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E G Y P T

EGYPT OF YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

BY

PERCY WITHERS

M.B., B.S.

With thirty-two reproductions from photographs



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PREFACE

If excuse be needed for incursions by a mere tripper into paths so well trodden, and their features and characteristics so laboriously chronicled, by the learned, the writer has none to plead beyond his own self-gratification. He was privileged to spend month after month on the Nile, to potter leisurely and at will in the treasure-houses of old Egypt, with notebook and camera, to find there many a guide, philosopher, and friend, and to return in the possession of, he would hope, some little knowledge —delight and appreciation certainly and in abundance ; and which, though imperfectly, these pages are intended to convey.

However humble his book, an author must incur many obligations. In some cases they are too vague and too general to express ; others are direct, are associated with particular names in special acts of help and kindness, and these he claims, among his first pleasures, the privilege of recording. In the present instance, besides those many books—happily accessible to all—which have been chiefly drawn

PREFACE

upon, and of which it is hoped sufficient recognition has been made in the footnotes, the author desires to express his thanks to Professor Petrie for generous permission to use the sayings of Egyptian religious and moral teachers gathered together in the delightful book called *Religion and Conscience in Ancient Egypt*—a permission of which free advantage has been taken ; to Professor Sayce, to M. Clermont-Ganneau, to Mr Weigall, Inspector-General of Antiquities, and to Mr F. F. Ogilvie—if ever they should chance to see these words—for personal kindnesses, but for which this book could never have been written ; to Mr J. D. Hughes for invaluable suggestions and unflagging interest ; to Mr W. R. Rose, of 23 Bridge Street Row, Chester, for the photographs of Philæ, Abu Simbel, the Colossi of Memnon, the two feluccas, and the Sphinx ; and most of all to his friend Miss Monica Heywood for such help, in many ways, as only an author can need and a friend give.

ABBOTS BAY,
KESWICK.

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To
MY WIFE

I

THE NILE

I

LEGEND was the only means known to antiquity of explaining the yearly doings of the Nile. To-day knowledge has replaced legend, and yet the Nile remains no less a miracle, and myth its most fitting attendant and interpreter. Of the sum of wonders which make up Egypt not one seizes on the imagination as does this silent, impassive flood, which is its heart and arteries in one, its very life and being. Hinder in its course the river of another land, and men would count their inconvenience by days, or not at all; stop the Nile, and you bring ruin, death, to a whole country. The Nile is Egypt.

But the mystery attaching to it is hardly less than its boon. And this is where legend crept in. Men believed that the Nile had its source in Paradise, and that thence, like the river of a later dream, it flowed "thro' caverns measureless to man" down

to the world and to Egypt. There was no difficulty in determining the place of its arrival on earth. Aswan, and its fearsome desert hills and waste valleys, was the outpost, so to speak, of man's geographical knowledge ; and it is just at such places, dark to the eye but lurid to the imagination, that man, in an age of credulity, finds for his fancies "a local habitation and a name". It was at Aswan that the Nile issued from heaven to earth, from the gods to men, and the turmoil of its waters as they rushed down the steep granite ledges we call the Cataract, was the accepted sign.

But there was another difficulty to explain, namely, the periodic variation in volume. Here imagination was unaided even by the scantiest knowledge or experience. The river fell from the flood level of autumn, lower and lower, till it became in early summer no more than a chain of stagnant pools. Can we not imagine the denials and misgivings imposed by such conditions—alarms, indeed, were it not that they had befallen last year, and every year within man's memory, and yet that relief had never failed to come ? Not only did the phenomenon occur, year by year, but the people could foretell its happening almost to the day. They watched eagerly, as the prophet of another race watched for the coming rain-cloud ; and when the signs at last appeared, they were in truth not less trifling or reassuring than, to that other, was the

cloud no bigger than a man's hand. First a trickle found its way from pool to pool, as each gently overflowed the banks of mud in which it had lain imprisoned so many weeks. It was no more than the ruffling of the water's surface, but it was the promise of a miracle. For soon the trickle grew in speed and volume,—instead of one, were soon many, working their way hither and thither through the cracks and wrinkles of the river-bed ; until the various pools became a continuous stream, hurrying on northward with the glad tidings of a rising Nile. Day by day the flood increased ; obstacles of sunbaked mud which, earlier, it had circumvented, it now brushed roughly aside ; and the Nile, renewing its early prime, was trying its strength before overleaping the banks that held it, and deluging the thirsty lands of the valley.

This the people saw. Yet no rain had fallen to work the change ; the mountain ranges east and west had furnished not a single mountain stream. For up in the hills, as down in the valley, scarcely enough rain fell, year in and year out, even to moisten the ground. The Nile, then as now, was the sole source of water for all Egypt. Hence the anxious watching ; hence, when it was ended, the miracle. . . . Away in Paradise, Isis sat by the river at its source, weeping for her lost Osiris. A tear fell into the pool at her feet—only that ; and straightway the waters rose, flowing earthward, and

still rose till the river of the desert was replenished, and the dwellers in the desert satisfied.

Though Isis is no longer even a name to them, the inhabitants of Egypt still celebrate the "Night of the Drop". But with time the legend has passed from poetry to prose. It is not the tear of a goddess that feeds the Nile, but merely a "drop" sent down from heaven by night. Such is the belief to-day, held by Christian and Mohammedan alike.

II

For the rest of folk the explanation of the Nile's rising is even more prosiac, because it is true ; but the wonder is not less. Egypt wholly dependent on her river, and yet no rain from Egyptian skies, no streams from Egyptian hills, to add one fraction of an inch to its supply ! Like Molière, the Nile gathers its goods where it finds them, and it finds them in the highland torrents of Abyssinia and in the lakes and swamps of Central Africa, two thousand miles away. When, in early summer, Egypt is athirst for water, when her once fertile valley is arid and desolate as the neighbouring desert, and the driven dust lies thick on the ground like snow, her relief—and not only her relief but her life—depends entirely on the rains of Abyssinia, on the gift of a foreign land. Was ever so royal a gift in the world before ?

It is not difficult to imagine with what anxiety the ancient Egyptians looked for the rise of the

river. Dread was fostered, if not by actual experience, by the tales passed on from generation to generation of a year when it had failed. And, indeed, failure did not require to be absolute to involve suffering and famine. This plenty of the harvest depended, then as now, on a "good" Nile : anything less than the average flood meant need somewhere unsatisfied, or only partially satisfied. The night of the drop past, the day of rising begun, the anxious question repeated from mouth to mouth of a people in the pitiless grip of drought and desolation, was—to vary another query of a heart in suspense—"Watchman, what of the Nile?" And the watcher was there to answer. Even in the early days of Egyptian history records were taken at Elephantiné, the great island below the First Cataract, and the progress of the flood—the news of hope or dismay—communicated to the towns and villages lower down the river.¹ When, in the time of the XIIth dynasty, 2500 B.C., the Pharaohs had pushed their boundaries as far south as the Second Cataract, the place being still more favourable for observations, they made their records there. We can see them to-day, graven on the sheer rock banks of the river ; a mark here or there denoting an unusual level, and beside it the date and—as a seal to give it authority—the name of the reigning Pharaoh.

¹ Maspero's *Dawn of Civilisation*, 4th edition, p. 488.

Within a month of its rising the Nile is changed, and Egypt with it. The message that came like the still small voice is now fulfilled in all the majesty and power of a force of nature unloosed and unhindered. The surplusage of Central African swamps, the torrential rains of Abyssinia, all are poured headlong into the Nile, and delivered along the thousand miles of towns and villages in need. You look across the swollen river, now level with its banks, and in every second twelve thousand tons or more of water are hurrying past. Urgent was the want, lavish is the gift. At this stage of flood, and some time within the first half of July, the sluices and dykes are opened. So sudden and complete is the transformation, so strange the sight, that a visitor to Egypt might suppose the country in the grip of a national calamity rather than in the embrace of a natural law. But, for the inhabitants, it is an occasion of joy. It is the marriage of bridegroom and bride, of Egypt and the long-expected Nile.¹

The flood set free, Egypt ultimately becomes one vast lake of turbid water, stretching across the valley to the hills of the desert, east and west. Towns and hamlets, which, in view of the yearly inundation, are built on knolls of ground higher

¹ Even so late as Mohammedan times, in the eighth century of our era, the occasion was solemnised as a marriage, and the contract officially drawn up and witnessed. Vide *Dawn of Civilisation*, p. 24.

than the general level of the valley, lie like so many scattered islands, giving a sense of desolation and abandonment unrelieved even by the presence of the raised tracks, by chance and haphazard, it seems, connecting them. But the cost, if it be felt, is soon paid, though not without further anxiety. There is still the danger of the flood being too prolonged, and of pestilence following hard upon drought. So, between opposing fears, is the mind of the fellahéen buffeted, and the monotony of his slow, laborious, pleasureless life for a while disturbed, perhaps not all unkindly on the part of fate, or unwelcomed on his own.

Then comes the last scene of all—and all the Nile's doing, or failure to do. Egypt a desert—Egypt a flood—and now an Egypt smiling from end to end with green crops, and busy with toilers whose toil shall win back a hundredfold. "And lo, the desert blossoms as the rose"—before, an image of poetry, now fulfilled in sober prose. The river which brings the water brings also the rich deposit of fertilising products necessary to replenish, year by year, the spent soil of Egypt. Wherever it comes, there is the land renewed. The gift has been lavish and, after nature's fashion, careless and indiscriminate. The cotton-fields of the capitalist, the wide acres of the village shékh, the fellah's single unchallenged plot, all have shared the bounty alike; and every yard of it, this or that, is potentially so

much assured crop of cereal, pulse, or cotton. Bits of land are seized on and appropriated on the shelving banks of the river, though long before harvest the banks may give way and deposit soil and crop together into the Nile. Even the very bed of the river is utilised. And there are few more touching sights than to watch the poorest villagers reclaiming little patches of mud-bank left bare by the receding stream—for in this no-man's-land possession is the whole law—and marking each off with due sense of proprietorship by means of dried palm-sticks.

III

As there are, so it is said, many Egypts, so are there many Niles. The casual visitor is not greatly interested in the Nile of inundations, of fertilisation, of agriculture—the Nile that is Egypt ; for him the Nile is pleasure or nothing. He may even dismiss it as a muddy, monotonous river, having no claim on his regard beyond that of conveniently transporting him to his destination, or, perhaps, inconveniently stranding him on a sand-bank. For some it has ceased to have any attraction since the crocodiles said to inhabit it have been found to exist only in the minds of obliging (and interested) dragomans. It may be, indeed, that the Nile, like the neighbouring desert—like most things else supremely individual, and yet a little removed from common experience—reveals itself only to the few.

Its achievements, grandly planned and greatly executed, are a matter of knowledge; they may be summed up in terms of a nation's financial prosperity, of so many bales of cotton, so many bushels of wheat, so many of a population maintained in food and employment—all, in Browning's phrase, in short, “the vulgar mass called ‘work’”. But itself, the qualities that make it unlike any other river, and wonderful, the spirit that is its own and not another's—these are less easily come at, less easily caught.

The Nile has beauty, but its beauty is austere, at first even forbidding. It has moods—and what would a river be without moods?—but its moods are always serious, perhaps a little morose, and never wholly comprehensible. Other rivers, even great ones, are friendlier; the very variety of their ways makes them seem more human; their rapid changes from grave to gay provide a bond of intimacy, and intimacy with aught of nature's means affection; their music sings to you, and you understand the song. With the Nile it is far otherwise. The song it learned in the mountain fastnesses of Abyssinia it has lost in the vacant air of the Soudan, and never recaptured. Between eternities of desert wastes, on either hand, it acquires the silence of the desert, and, except for a little noisy bluster along the cataracts, maintains it to the end. It maintains also a calmness and imper-

turbability of demeanour which, in human kind, if such were possible, would be exasperating, and which, in a force of nature, gives it the aloofness of a divinity.

The truth is, you can no more dissociate the Nile from its thousands of years of history than you can detach another river from the scenes through which it flows. It is weighted with associations and memories, solemn with its ancient responsibility. This same river of Egypt rocked the cradle of the human race ; it had nursed and succoured a race of giants while other civilisations were still in infancy or yet unborn. How could such a river be frolicsome or familiar !

Perhaps this reserve, this aloofness, is felt only by the Occidental. Perhaps the dweller on its banks has inherited some talisman whereby he can come to close quarters with the river, which, ages back, helped to shape his character, and to-day sustains him. For him affection may be possible where, for us, the heart is left cold. From whatever cause, one does not, cannot, love the Nile. One loves the softened glare and the heat of the sun upon it ; one loves skimming over its ruffled surface in great-sailed feluccas ; one may come to love the desert in time, but the Nile—never ! A dozen other emotions are stirred, deeply stirred, not affection. The wonder of it, flowing sure as fatality through a land which, save for it, were a land of death ; its



fascination, its majesty, its silence, its mysteriousness,—these are the qualities which appeal for sympathy, and repay sympathy.

Yet at evening there is a moment when the Nile becomes something not itself, and wholly, inexpressibly satisfying. Not that it draws nearer ; for its new loveliness, seeming not of this earth, withdraws it far away into realms of fancy and dreams. But now it has power to take us with it, to take us clear of criticism and reason and apathy, and hold us in simple, delighted entrancement. The beauty is beyond all words to describe. It is the hour of sunset, and just before the sudden darkness of an Eastern night. The sun itself has already disappeared, but it has left behind, like the far-flung colours of a rainbow, nearly every hue and shade of which its own white light is composed. The hills and hollows of the desert recede into infinite depths of purple glow—the colour which is the desert's secret ; and in between lies the Nile, passing out of the gloom and again back to gloom, every ripple on its surface reflecting the many hues, like an opal, yet more brilliantly, as from some source within itself.

It seems as though the river were renewing its ancient worship of the Sun-god at his setting in the west. And in the act of worship, and at the moment of a common joy, all differences are forgotten. We may discuss the Nile by day ; at evening only submit.

II

PYRAMIDS AND SPHINX

I

ANTICIPATION of a first visit to the Pyramids is one of the great experiences of life ; but it is not altogether a comfortable one, not because it is so eager, but rather because of the misgivings which inevitably attach to it. It is a case of closing with a wonder which has hitherto been only a creature of the imagination ; and along with the thrill of satisfaction lurks the fear of disappointment. One has read the play, and dreads to see it acted. Nor do the accounts given by others, often with much sympathy and eloquence, greatly help. Rather do they increase the trouble. *Quot homines, tot sententiae.* But although many different opinions have been expressed on the result of a first visit ; although some of them confess to a bitter disappointment and some to an unsatisfactory indecision,—they all agree after further acquaintance, and agree in unqualified wonder and praise. The earlier impression is hardly

to be marvelled at. For such are the pranks played by imagination, that, familiar as the form and design have been from childhood, the eye is scarcely prepared for anything so simple and so rugged, for such a total absence of ornamentation and such an immensity of nakedness.

But it is the size that surprises and disappoints, or, not the size—that comes on one later, and comes with the force and conviction of an avalanche—but just so much of it as the sight can appreciate at a first survey. The feeling is of having been taken in, deluded into false hopes by piles of meaningless figures and misjudged comparisons. For, as human monuments go, the bulk seems great enough, but not deeply impressive ; the height positively insignificant. Can this be the Great Pyramid, the achievement which has been likened to the work of gods or giants, not of men, and which can be seen twenty miles across level desert like a distant, solitary hill ?

Then the truth comes home as it came to Kinglake. You are ploughing through deep sand along the base, and, when the corner is reached, pause to look and question, and for breath. Then comes another side to traverse—a third—a fourth ; and, when the circuit is completed, you have been a substantial walk of well over half a mile. You measure one of the stones beside you. It is twenty feet in length ; another, thirty feet. You stand far enough back to command the whole surface, its length at the

base, its height at the apex ; and the measured single stones give you the clue. These ten-, twenty-, forty-ton stones are the bricks of which the colossal structure is built, and they are piled one on another by the hundred and the thousand. To gauge the vastness of this Pyramid of Cheops you must use the methods you adopt with the mountain—walk round it, climb its side from ledge to ledge, and sweep the horizon from its summit. Nothing less suffices.

The figures dealing with this “most prodigious monument ever raised by the hand of man” are those of astronomy. They are easily told. According to Professor Petrie’s reckoning it contains 2,300,000 blocks of stone, varying in weight from a few hundredweight to about fifty tons, and totalling 6,840,000 tons—stone sufficient to build a substantial wall round the British Isles ; or, cut into blocks one foot square and laid end to end, to stretch two-thirds round the globe ; or, to take another illustration given by Professor Rawlinson, to provide twenty-two thousand good roomy houses, the walls throughout a foot thick, each capable of accommodating seven or eight people in health and comfort. This means that the stone of the Great Pyramid would build the towns of Brighton or Blackburn over again, and build them better—houses, public halls, libraries, all that completes the equipment of a large modern town.

So much for the mass ; its proportions are hardly less wonderful. Each side measures seven hundred and fifty feet at the base, the total area covered is thirteen acres—an area four times that of a great city square—and upon it these millions of hewn and dressed stones are piled to a height of four hundred and fifty-six feet, or one hundred feet higher than the dome of St Paul's Cathedral. Within—if you care to traverse difficult, airless passages—you may gain the chamber at the very heart of the mass, of which the mountain of stone is but the walls and roof, and for the provision of which, and its housing of a royal mummy, all this opulence of time and money, all the toil and all the pain, were given.

Yet given in vain. The utmost that ingenuity and skill could do to preserve the body inviolate was done. The corridor, elaborately constructed, led from the exterior opening, which was situated, not at the ground level, but fifty feet above it, onwards and downwards until at last it ended in a half-finished chamber three hundred and twenty feet from the entrance, and far below the base of the pyramid. But not here lay the mummy. The pillager having discovered the external opening—how, in all the thousands of square feet of masonry?—and having followed the carefully wrought passage to its end, had come in vain. In reality the main corridor, leading to the mummy-chamber, turned off from the other twenty yards along its

course, but the entrance to it was concealed by one enormous block of granite, so huge and so accurately adjusted that admission to the passage beyond could only be effected by tunnelling round the granite block through the masonry of the pyramid itself. And when the tunnelling was done, and the corridor at last gained, the discovery of mummy and mummy-chamber was still far off. Another one hundred and twenty feet of steep floor to work along, then through the great hall, twenty-eight feet high and one hundred and fifty-five feet in length—that marvel of construction, the great wall-slabs of which are so exactly shaped and dressed that hardly a hair can be inserted into the joints between them—beyond, another low passage to scramble through for twenty feet or more, and then—a blank wall! Here at last was the treasure-room, and here all the wit and all the skill of the Egyptian builder had been used safely to guard it. The blank wall was nothing but an elaborate series of trap-doors, at once disguising and protecting the chamber on the other side. The trap-doors were four large blocks of granite which slid with the accuracy of steel bars into grooves of surrounding masonry, entirely masking the entrance to the chamber, where lay—for eternity, they thought, and schemed—the mummy of Cheops in its granite sarcophagus.

The energy and skill to do, deflected into another channel and in another age, became resolute to

undo. From the XXth dynasty, 1200 B.C., up to the Middle Ages, men strove to discover the secret passage, and to gain the inner chamber. They mined and tunnelled as vigorously as men will in search of gold. Success, however long delayed, was inevitable; success of the later plunderers, failure of the early builders, of the early purpose, of the hopes and beliefs dearest to the heart of the great Pharaohs. It had long been prophesied. A Jeremiah of those days had foretold the result : "He who built there in red granite, who constructed a chamber in his pyramid ; who supplied there what was beautiful in this fine work his altar shall be as empty as those of the weary, who die on the canal embankment without leaving any survivors". And even so, and even in the case of Cheops, with these millions of tons of stone, these schemes, these devices to guard him, have the words been fulfilled.

There it stands, this Great Pyramid, which men have gazed upon, marvelled at, discussed for fifty centuries. The impression made on the mind of Herodotus may perhaps be measured by the fact that he attributed to the pile a height nearly three hundred and fifty feet in excess of the truth. To another traveller, Abd-ul-Latif, an Arab writer of the thirteenth century, it was not the dimensions, but the endurance of the structure that seemed most wonderful. He exclaims, "All things fear time, but time fears the Pyramids". If the note of exaggeration can ever

be sounded with propriety, surely here, at least, the old Arab chose ill. For, after all, the Great Pyramid (and in lesser degree its two colossal neighbours) is too big a thing either to need or to deserve hyperbole. It must be classed, where the Irishman put it, among the hard facts. Even so, it will serve the turn of rhetoric. "Soldiers", cried Napoleon, when his army was assembled near the plains of Ghizeh, "soldiers, twenty centuries look down upon you". What a heartening on the verge of battle! But if Napoleon had been as good an archæologist as he was a general, he would have trebled the years, and been nearer the truth. The Pyramid of Cheops was ancient as buildings are called ancient when "Abraham went down into Egypt to sojourn there", and yet to-day it stands almost unchanged. The outer casing, smoothed and polished, which once beamed like a beacon across the desert, drawing men's eyes to the majesty of a Pharaoh's power and to the triumph of a power yet greater than a Pharaoh, has long since gone, and left the surface rugged and broken like so many steps hewn by giants, by which we may survey the giants' labour and compute the skill. Greater depredation were scarcely possible, even in the slow-wearing course of centuries. Men built it, but hardly the forces of nature could disturb it.

Possibly time has made its aspect more welcome to modern eyes. Some day an old record may be

turned up from the sands finally to settle the doubt, but meanwhile it is not known of what material the outer casing consisted. According to one classical writer, named Philo, in a treatise on the Seven Wonders of the World,¹ many different stones were employed, such as marble, basalt, porphyry, and green breccia. There is no inherent improbability in the statement. The Egyptians used colour everywhere, and used it lavishly, both for pictorial purposes, to deck the walls of a tomb, and on the great carved stones of their temples. They loved colour as the child loves it, dared as greatly in the practice of it, and no more feared the consequences. And here were so many acres of surface waiting the desire; here an opportunity the magnitude of which had never before occurred, never again could occur. It was as though the child were allotted the four walls of his nursery, given colour and a brush, and left unmolested. Perhaps a nation, and that nation Egypt, could as little resist the chance. If it were taken, not even the spacious mosaics of Florence can give us any notion of the result; nor, in the presence of the wonder that is, need we wish further wonder added, nor lament such of it as has gone.

¹ G. Perrot (*History of Art in Ancient Egypt*, vol. i. p. 224 *et seq.*) quotes Philo's statement as deserving respectful consideration from the fact that on other occasions he proved to be much more accurate than most early writers.

It is well that the surface, polished and coloured or not, should have perished. The Great Pyramid, solemn and gloomy like a mountain crag, now looks the thing it is. It shows its wonder better; it shows, too, better, all the arrogance and suffering and wrong that went to build it. One hundred thousand men, says Herodotus, toiled for twenty years,¹ quarrying in the Mokattam Hills, dragging blocks of stone, such as no engineer would dream of using to-day, across desert and river and more desert, and finally piling them—accurately shaped and dressed—layer upon layer, to the heights already named. A whole nation must have been set to the slavish task, a whole nation striven to do, and agonised to do, this bidding of a single man. The Pyramid of the Pharaoh Cheops is the result, a monument of royal prowess and skill, of heedless cruelty and sublime folly.

II

A little distance away stands the Sphinx, a monument greater than the other by the whole difference between sculpture and masonry, art and engineering. History, archæology, theology, all have their word to say about the Sphinx, but the last word spoken of it is that of the eldest of the Muses.

¹ That, at least. The writer has the authority of Sir John Aird for the opinion that he, Sir John, with all his hydraulic cranes and the rest, doubted if he could construct the Great Pyramid in this period.

There is a story told of an American lady who hurried back to her Cairo hotel with the disquieting news that her visit to Ghizeh had discovered only one Sphinx. She had "run around" looking for the other, but her search had been fruitless. The lady's instinct was at least as faulty as her archæology. To look once into the great stone face of the desert, and to look aright, is to feel that only one such is possible. "There is nothing new under the sun", so far as the phrase applies to anything, applies to everything save the Sphinx. Once only has a crag of living rock, upheaved by the forces of nature, been transformed, on a scale matching theirs, into a masterpiece of the sculptor's art. Easier to imagine a second Parthenon, a dozen "Winged Victories", than to conceive anything else in the world, before or since, like this. Let there be no misunderstanding. The unknown sculptor of Egypt is not to be placed alongside Phidias or his unknown fellow-craftsmen of Greece, nor their work, simply as art, compared. A gulf of twenty centuries and the whole distance of Athenian culture lie between. Yet when all is said, and when all the emotions aroused are taken into account—their number, variety, and depth—the Sphinx stands quite alone and apart among the splendid achievements of man.

Out of a single lump of rock rising above the desert has this gigantic statue been carved. Its lion body is ninety feet long, its face of such enormous

proportions as to measure fourteen feet across. The nose, now, alas, missing, was five feet seven inches in length. A human face magnified in every feature thirty times ! There seems to be no settled opinion with regard to its date, some authorities considering it prehistoric (perhaps six thousand years old), others placing it as late as 2500 B.C. But surely no monument ever needed so little a certificate of birth. Its form and features compel the sense of a remote, undreamed-of antiquity ; and its dilapidations, which in size and character are rather those of the living rock than of a statue, seem to require a computation of geological ages, not of the numbered years of history.

And yet, in spite of age, in spite of peculiarities which give to the Sphinx an aloofness as of

“ something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow ”,

it is indeed of men, conceived and schemed and fashioned by men, and expresses the constant burden of humanity—the burden of the mystery of life. It was born in a day when mankind had for once and all passed from the objective unreflecting period of youth, when answers are ready to hand and satisfying, and had entered upon that of subjective speculation. Objects chosen from the world around, as having some special significance, had hitherto provided men with gods meet for their worship. But

now a further stage was reached. Familiar things, however specialised and uncommon, were felt to be inadequate ; and the Sphinx, like the composite animals of Assyrian art, was designed to express the growing consciousness of a mystery inadequately symbolised by any natural form, human or animal.¹

But it is not on these things one ponders in the presence of the Sphinx. There are a thousand composite animals in Egyptian sculpture to serve the needs of science. This one has another purpose. The age that found its own sense of mystery fittingly represented by combining a human face with an animal body produced an artist capable of expressing it for the ages to come. What a tribute to the scarred and noseless statue, which we see in pictures and smile at, that one may look into the face and be conscious neither of scars nor mutilations, be lost to everything save the expression, on the lips, in the deep-searching eyes, under which all who behold it come, as under a spell ! Browning, in that spacious imagery of which he is master, speaks of the "good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth ". None, surely, has ever found the phrase that fits the smile on the great stone face in the desert. It is typical of life itself,—expansive, fascinating, sweet and serious as life, and, as life, inscrutable. The eyes look for ever across the wastes of desert, but not so much into distance as into time—nay, into eternity,

¹ *Vide* Caird's *Evolution of Religion*, vol. i. p. 229.

where the secret lies. Men question, and the smile is the answer, but it is the smile of the Sphinx.

III

Two lesser pyramids, but yet of enormous proportions and dating from the same period, stand close at hand. Southward along the desert plateau to Dashur are sixty more, some of them still older than those of Ghizeh, many badly ruined, and making together a cemetery twenty-five miles in length, of which these pyramids are the gravestones. They are the tombs of kings and princes, of men a little bigger than their fellows, whose resting-places must therefore be signalised by greater and more enduring monuments. Western races, with the same end in view, were content to heap earth into great mounds to mark the mortal remains of their chiefs. But the Egyptians, far as they go backward into the abyss of time, already possessed skill and knowledge sufficient to construct buildings on a vast plan and with perfect mathematical exactitude. No mechanical difficulties were too great for them to tackle and successfully overcome. They could and did constantly manipulate blocks of stone of such colossal size as no engineer to-day would dream of using—not merely move them hither and thither, as brute force can, but shape and dress them and fit them into a general scheme of masonry with an accuracy which could not be surpassed, if indeed it could be

equalled, to-day. Not yet were they far enough advanced to shape the lotus-capitals of the Ramesseum or to evolve the hypostyle hall of Karnak. That was to come later—a flower worthy the promise of the plant. But the promise was already there, in the Pyramids, in the Sphinx. To look at them is to feel it. You cannot see those gigantic piles of ordered stone without realising that to such a nation the greatest achievements of architecture were possible. They show the genius of the race, its capacity for taking infinite pains, its greatness of purpose, its grandiose conceptions. The very form of the pyramid is proof of this. It allowed of indefinite expansion, of ever-increasing height, ever-widening base. By adding layer upon layer, the growth could continue indefinitely, and at last was only stayed, perhaps, by such an extraneous occurrence as the death of the king for whom the monument was intended.

In early Egyptian history there is still a wide discrepancy between the dates computed by various archæologists. The temptation is to accept the most remote, so much greater is the wonder, the mystery. And what do a few centuries count, more or less, in the millenniums of Egypt! But, on the most moderate calculations, some of the Pyramids date back 3000 years B.C. They were, in the time of Abraham, as old as our Norman castles are to-day. Yet already the Egyptians were a highly cultivated race, far advanced in the arts of peace. Hundreds of years

before pyramid-building, they had turned the Nile bodily out of its course under the Libyan hills into a more eastward channel, in order to gain a wider irrigation of the plain. In the little "Temple of the Sphinx"—one of the lesser but not less interesting monuments of Ghizeh—the sixteen quadrangular piers are monoliths sixteen feet six inches high and three feet four inches by four feet eight inches in section, of the hardest rose-pink granite. They were quarried away in the hills of Aswan, carried down to the river-side, conveyed along seven hundred miles of river, carried over more desert to the scene of operation, and set in position. The roof consists of similar slabs ten feet in length. One chamber of the temple is constructed entirely of blocks of alabaster, so perfectly smoothed and polished that a lighted match casts a glow on the surface, as upon a still pool of water. The art of working these hardest stones could only have been pursued, according to experts, by the use of drills fitted with some or other precious stone — nothing less adamantine would suffice. And on this Professor Sayce makes the striking comment, "It was left for the nineteenth century to rediscover the instrument when the Mont Cenis tunnel was half completed".

In handicraft there was the same complete mastery over technical difficulties. The hardest stones gathered from the Red Sea coast they converted into highly finished ornaments; ivory they

polished and engraved ; even obsidian, brought from the islands of the Ægean, they were able to make into shapely vases. But they went still further. It is only necessary to look on the limestone group of statuary of Prince Ra-hotep and his lady, in the Cairo Museum, to feel how much further. It dates from the earliest pyramid days. The fine idealism, the exquisite nervous sensibility of Greek sculpture is missing ; but as a presentment of living humanity, of flesh and blood, nothing could be more lifelike, more wonderful. As with all Egyptian sculpture of the period, the care of the artist has been lavished on the features and expression of face ; the limbs are treated conventionally, as though the sameness of these members common to all mankind rendered them undeserving individual concern. But the figure of the woman is modelled with the utmost delicacy, showing the natural graceful curves beneath a covering of light drapery.

And the figures, sitting side by side, look back from the ages five thousand years gone by.

Standing before the Sphinx, it is well to recall these things. In the gaze of those mild eyes the mystery grows. The face still smiles, but the smile seems less kindly. Is it, perhaps, the smile of derision ?

III

LUXOR

AND now abideth Cairo, Aswan, Luxor, these three ; but the greatest of these is Luxor. The backward glance often shows places in a heightened light ; of Luxor the utmost one can think or dream has been realised, and may be realised again. Pleasure is as long there as the day. At half-past six the sun is over the hill-tops ; half an hour later breakfast is served in the hotel ; and by eight o'clock, while the air is still sweet and fresh, like that of the first hour of an English June morning, the visitor may be scampering on his donkey along the road to Karnak, or across the open plain, mile after mile, to the temples and tombs of Thebes. There is a new temple, a new tomb, a fresh wonder for each day, not of the three days allotted by tourist steamers, but of three months. For Luxor is the site of the city sung of by Homer :

“ By the fertile stream
Where, in Egyptian Thebes, the heaps of precious
ingots gleam,
The hundred-gated Thebes ”;

and from the bank of the Nile on one side to the hills far away on the other side, and even into the valleys and defiles beyond, the ground is strewn with the ancient remains, the very rocks tunnelled with storehouses of the ancient treasure.

One day, crossing in the boat after a long morning on the western shore, a dragoman who had seen me on more than one occasion in the same temple, and seemed duly impressed, made some remark or other about the way in which tourists so often rush round. I asked if three days was not the usual allowance. He replied that three days were generally considered ample, "and", he added, more in sorrow, I thought, than in either anger or amusement, "I have known people do it in two, and have half a day to spare". Apart from the physical energy entailed in circuiting Thebes, in merely visiting the temples on both sides of the river and the tombs in the distant scorching valleys, the most remarkable thing about the achievement is that "half a day to spare". But perhaps it was the reward of the previous day and a half's labour, and who would grudge it !

But it is true that to some folk time is too long even at Luxor. For the proof of the dragoman's experience was picturesquely conveyed to me only a few days later, when a visitor confessed that he found nothing to do in the place but shoot quails. Really, there was nothing wrong with the speaker;

it was only that somehow he had got things upside down, so to say. In modern Luxor he found only ancient dirt, and ancient odours, and in the ancient ruins he saw only modern stone-heaps.

Yet, indeed, there is joy of life at Luxor even as at Aswan,—joy if not a single temple of the old world were left to visit. The Nile is here less interesting, less individual than at Aswan. Instead of flowing between ledges of rock and among rocky islands, fantastically worn and twisted, it sweeps placidly through miles of low, level plain. But the great feluccas glide no less serenely on its waters, and at evening the lights stream over the Theban hills and over the plain and across the river no less bewitchingly. At all other hours the gain of colour is unquestionable. The desert recedes into the distance, leaving miles of green fields between, and these, welcome enough in their own freshness, provide an “atmosphere” for the whole scene. In the morning the dew is on them, and at sunrise a blue mist, like the smoke of pine-wood, hangs lightly over the valley, palpable enough to soften, not to veil, the outlines of hills, east and west. And even when the vapour has lifted, sufficient moisture is evaporated to give blueness to the distance. The hills of tombs, straight in front of the town, are too near to benefit ; beside, the sun is full upon them, smiting their red-embrasured front like a shield of

copper. But those furthest away take the colours like the hills at home, faint or more intense as they lie nearer the horizon, but never, in the fiercest light, quite losing it.

Only those whose eyes week after week have looked on desert—desert from their feet right up to the hills, can understand the refreshment of these green spaces and of the blue haze. The desert has its own delights, its own profound charm ; but perhaps the rapid change from Aswan to Luxor first proves at what a sacrifice they are bought. It is said that Browning, in contrasting his own work with Tennyson's, once said that the poetry of the latter was like a luscious liqueur, while his own was but “boiled bones and brandy”. However aptly the latter phrase applies to the insistent lurid poetry of Browning, it is not inappropriate as applied to desert scenery. At any rate there is joy in the sips of the Luxor vintage after a long draught of the other.

But it is to Luxor as the site of ancient Thebes that folk come from all the world over. The epithet “hundred-gated”, found in Homer, was repeated by later classical writers and travellers as a figurative way of describing the vast size of the city. This is the quality which seems most to have impressed them. When they saw it, it was already a city of ruins ; native villages were scattered over the plain, encroaching on the old monuments, and

the precincts of former temples were now the common holdings of the peasantry. Strabo, the Augustan geographer, was possibly one of the three-days visitors, with time to spare. His account is brief and perfunctory ; but the ancient glory was then gone ; invasions from without, feuds within, and the rise of other cities into sovereign eminence, had all contributed to the decadence of what formerly had been the metropolis of the world ; and the confusion of ruins, dotted undistinguishably among the native hamlets, gave Strabo an excuse for hastening on to fresh woods and pastures new.

The huge population of earlier days has melted away as the city has done. Only the single temple of Luxor is surrounded by dwellings, constituting the little modern town, and the refuge of tourists ; a few cottages, half hidden by palm trees, lie a little way from Karnak ; and on the western bank the many temples are left in undisputed possession of the fringe of desert bordering the fertile plain.

Such is the scene of Thebes, the hundred-gated, once the theme of a Greek poet when he wished to convey the notion of urban pride and splendour, now a vast plain with here and there, grouped and sequestered, the habitations of men, and here and there, happily, in piles still noble and glorious, the relics of the past.

In the long period of Egyptian history Thebes

was twice the seat of the ruling Pharaohs, once during the so-called Middle Empire (2200–1700 B.C.), when the kings of the XIth and XIIth dynasties were in possession of the throne, and again under the New Empire (1600–1100 B.C.), which included the kings of the four dynasties from the XVIIth to the XXth. The five centuries over which the latter extended saw both the rise and the decline of Thebes. During that period Egypt produced a long line of great monarchs, of men renowned in war and in peace, and became in consequence the ruling power of the world. Under the greatest of her soldiers, Thothmes III. (1501–1447 B.C.), whom historians place side by side with Alexander, Hannibal, and Napoleon, her dominion extended from Ethiopia in the south to Syrian Carchemish in the north, from the western desert tribes to the principalities and powers on the Euphrates. In seventeen successive campaigns, conducted by land and sea, he defeated the kings of Syria-Palestine singly and in league, reduced their towns, including the Phœnician cities on the coast and such ancient strongholds as Megiddo, Kadesh, and Carchemish, and brought them into complete subjection. Annual tribute poured in from the marts and workshops of the civilised world. Richly laden vessels sailed up the Nile to Thebes, and there discharged cargoes of precious merchandise, ingots of gold and silver, ready for the uses of

commerce, gold and ivory wrought into vases and drinking cups, weapons encrusted with gems, silks and fabrics of gorgeous colour, horses, chariots, and all manner of produce from the fields and vineyards of Western Asia. The year through on the quays of Thebes the curiosity and imagination of the populace were whetted by the strange tongues and the strange habiliments of foreigners, and by the wealth of treasure thus poured into the lap of Egypt; and the national pride was fired by the knowledge that these foreigners, representing so many kingdoms, were the vassals of their own ruler, and that the treasure they brought was acknowledgment of his world-wide power.

No wonder the conquests abroad were followed by glorious achievements at home. Egypt was now in a position which no other nation had hitherto won. Only a century had elapsed since she shook herself free from the rule of foreigners, of "Shepherd Kings" from some provinces of Asia ; now, in so short a time, she had become undisputed mistress of the kingdoms, south and east. When a nation so great in war and conquest turns to home and peace, its purposes are not less greatly fulfilled. Thebes, and not Thebes only, but the Nile for a thousand miles of its course, from the Delta to the Third Cataract, witnessed the result in a series of monuments unprecedented in size and splendour. Even Thothmes, before his fourscore years were finished,

and spite of the two hundred and forty-eight towns he was set to conquer, and many of them to reconquer, found time to build temples and erect obelisks at various cities from end to end of his kingdom. But it was still later on, when the nation was more completely free to devote itself to the arts of peace, that Thebes came into its own. Amenophis III., reposing on the victories won by his martial forbears, carried Egypt to glory in architectural achievement as Thothmes had done in military ; and the capital of the empire reaped the princely harvest. He "proceeded to give the great buildings of the city a unity which they had not before possessed. He raised a massive pylon before the temple of Karnak, adorned with unsurpassed richness ; stelas of lapis-lazuli were set up on either side and, besides great quantities of gold and silver, nearly twelve hundred pounds of malachite were employed in the inlay work. From the river an avenue led up to it between two tall obelisks, and before it his architect, Amenhotep, set up for him his portrait colossus, the largest thus far erected, having been hewn from a single block of tough gritstone sixty-seven feet long. . . . He then laid out a beautiful garden in the interval of over a mile and a half which separates the Karnak from the Luxor temple, and connected the great temples by avenues of rams carved in stone, each bearing a statue of the Pharaoh between the fore-paws. The

general effect must have been imposing in the extreme ; the brilliant hues of the polychrome architecture, with columns and gates overwrought in gold and floors overlaid with silver, the whole dominated by towering obelisks clothed in glittering metal, rising high above the rich green of the nodding palms and tropical foliage which framed the mass,—all this must have produced an impression both of gorgeous detail and overwhelming grandeur ”.

The western plain on the other side of the river kept pace with the sudden glory of Karnak and Luxor. There Amenophis erected his own mortuary temple. “ Two gigantic colossi of the king, nearly seventy feet high, each cut from one block and weighing over seven hundred tons, besides a pair of obelisks, stood before the pylon, which was approached from the river by an avenue of jackals sculptured in stone. Numerous other great statues of the Pharaoh were ranged about the colonnades of the court. . . . In mere mass alone some of these works of industrial art were surprising, for the brass hinges and other mountings of the vast cedar pylon-doors weighed together some tons, and required castings of unprecedented size ; while the overlaying of such doors with sheets of bronze exquisitely damascened in precious metal with the figure of the god, demanded a combination of æsthetic capacity with mastery of ponderous

mechanics which is not too common even at the present day."¹

The picture recalls the splendour of an ancient Eastern city, in which inexhaustible wealth and the most cunning skill in art and craft combine to effect a glory seen to-day only in imaginings and dreams. The spirit that animated it, the voluptuousness that was its flesh and blood, have passed; but the skeleton remains, bleached and battered and disarticulated, yet grand and shapely, proof of the giant's stature. The mortuary temple of Amenophis, possibly the finest of all Egyptian temples, has vanished as completely as though it had never been; but this monarch's other great building, the temple dedicated to the Theban god, Ammon, and situated on the eastern plain of Thebes, is still standing and is to-day known as the temple of Luxor.

The hotels are all within a few minutes' walk of the temple. It is easy to "drop in" in the odd hours spared from the longer expeditions. Perhaps of all Egyptian buildings this is the one to come to most often, and to love best. On one side lies the river, broad and silent, with the wide-sailed ships passing to and fro; on the other three the modern town, close up to it. Yet one may be as

¹ *Vide* Breasted's *History of Egypt*, pp. 344-346, from the learned and graphic narrative of which the above account of Thebes is largely drawn.

completely at peace there, recall as uninterruptedly hallowed thoughts of the past, as in the cloisters of a cathedral at home. The great piles of stones which fill the spaces and hide the vistas of other temples are absent,—all its size and spaciousness and loftiness are one's own, to move in and to soar in at will. There, as nowhere else, one may lose the heat and burden of the Egyptian day, the weariness and languor of one's own mood. And at evening, always a sacred hour in the quiet places of Egypt, the beauty of the evening falls most benignly. Courts and colonnades lie open to the sky and the sunset, and the glow reaches them from plain and river, suffuses the grey stones like a blush, and calls back for a moment the richness and colour of a former day. Vultures wheel "slow as in sleep" overhead, before settling to roost on the topmost stones. And then comes the muezzin, calling from his turret. His mosque fills up the extreme north-east corner of the temple, buries much of its architecture, and spoils the fine sweep of columns and avenues and courts that would else be got from pylon to sanctuary. But at this hour the loss is forgiven, forgotten. The muezzin of the little mosque of Abu'l Haggag is an artist, and he sings his message, not as a task, but for love of it. Slowly he circuits the balcony of his turret, here and there pausing as he goes, now lifting his face up to the sky, now bending it to earth and to his

flock. Expostulation, ecstasy, love, pity, wrong—all are to be heard, felt, in that lone voice that rises and falls as the singer moves round and round his watch-tower, waking the silent spaces of the old temple and passing away into the night.

But at all hours and all seasons there is the joy of the temple itself, of the grandeur and unity of design, of the completeness of plan, and of the beauty of detail. In none other of the great temples of the New Empire is it possible to see so clearly and so comprehensively the great thing an Egyptian temple is, its magnitude, opulence, variety, richness. The Greek temple was a perfect and finished whole; no additions were possible; when the last stone was added, the size and form were for ever fixed. To theirs the Egyptians could add indefinitely, and did so add. A building complete in itself in the XVIIIth dynasty might grow, as a tree grows, through the succeeding centuries, and still be growing when Egypt had passed under the rule of Ptolemaic kings and Roman emperors, fifteen hundred years later. The genius of the race seemed to need such conditions of unrestraint, of unlimited scope. When it ceased to build pyramids that towered into the blue it must have tombs which allowed of indefinite extension into the heart of the mountain, and temples which would never be finished as long as a Pharaoh lived to add to them.

Standing in the great court of Rameses II., be-

tween colossal statues of that monarch, and looking down an avenue of columns forty-two feet in height, through another great court, on to a huge group of clustered columns beyond, now roofless, beyond which, again, are a score of halls and chambers and passages, many of them pillared and all laden with sculpture from floor to ceiling ; then turning back to look on the enormous gate-towers which guard the entrance to the temple, the whole space of Rameses' court between, circuited by a massive double colonnade, containing seventy-four columns in all,—thus the vastness, the majesty, the boundless wealth and arrogance and power of it all come home to one. For a distance of eight hundred and fifty feet the temple passes on, in a succession of courts, colonnades, columned halls and chambers. Even so, the size as compared with Karnak sinks into insignificance. Yet, elsewhere than in Egypt, the mere size would make a seven days' wonder ; nor in Egypt itself, though every day repeats the experience, does this quality, whether at Karnak or Luxor, less or more, lose in impressiveness or ever fail to excite a tumult of astonishment and reverence. The architecture of Egypt has rightly been called the “architecture of giants”.

The whole temple is the work of two kings of succeeding dynasties, separated in time by a hundred years or more—how far separated in character, in taste and feeling, a casual visit may prove and re-

peated visits more deeply impress. Amenophis III., the Lorenzo de' Medici of his day, lived for beauty as his ancestors, the makers of the XVIIIth dynasty, had lived for war and conquest. Their activities had been abroad ; his were at home. They had filled the coffers of Egypt ; he lavished the money with no less exuberant energy on temples and sculpture. As in Greece in a later day, the supply even in the high domain of art met the demand ; and suddenly these great temples—the one on the western plain of the city, entirely gone, and this of Luxor—came into being. The king's reign only lasted thirty-five years, from 1427 to 1392 B.C., and within this period the work was done. Luxor temple Amenophis did not live to complete. He built the great court, the hall of columns, and a score other rooms and chambers ; and then he schemed the greatest project of all, namely, another magnificent hall of columns, in magnitude and reach beyond the furthest thought of any Pharaoh before him. He saw the central aisle of the new building erected, he saw its seven pairs of columns rising to a height of forty-two feet and spreading out the noble curves of their capitals to support the ponderous roof-stones—this he saw, he who had lived for these things, and was then gathered to his fathers.

The aisle, incomplete as he left it, still dominates the ruins. Never before, and never since except in Egyptian architecture, have columns of such

gigantic size been used. Lining the pathway on either side they form an avenue like to that of mightiest forest trees, and convey the same impression of grandeur, loftiness, and strength. To crown such colossal pillars of stone a new form of capital was necessary. The usual variety was incurved or bud-shaped, as we see it in the adjoining court. This design, carved on however great a scale, would have been entirely inappropriate as a termination to columns of such enormous height. The taste and ingenuity of that day proved equal to the need, and there came into being the calyx or campaniform capital, like the inverted bell of a flower, opening the great whorl of its petals beneath the massive stone-work which it was to support. Whether the form was devised from the lotus-flower or from the papyrus, the delicate filaments of which droop away from the centre in sweeping curves, or whether these natural forms provided only vague suggestions, are questions still discussed by critics learnedly and inconclusively, perhaps needlessly. Both lotus and papyrus were loved of the Egyptians. They were the emblems of the two Egypts, Upper and Lower; they were used everywhere and in a hundred ways by sculptor and artist on the walls of temples and tombs. Doubtless such a love had its effect on the creation of the new capital —the crowning achievement of Egyptian architectural ornament; and doubtless, also, the new

capital is one of the most glorious tributes ever designed by man to the influence of plant-form.

The stone avenue of Amenophis leads southward to the open court, the hypostyle hall, and the many lesser chambers of the temple as Amenophis himself left it, and northward to the great court and gate-towers added a century or more later by Rameses II. The court of the former king is one of the supremely beautiful things in Egypt. It possesses all the grandeur, all the spaciousness of a Pharaoh's building, and yet there is not a line of the vast sculptured space which is not beautiful. It covers an area of over twenty thousand square feet. Along three sides runs a double row of columns, a few of which have fallen ; and on the fourth side are the grandly massed columns of the hypostyle hall, thirty-two in number, arranged in rows four deep. The roof has gone ; only the massive slabs of the architrave lie across them ; and it is here that the lights of evening play most effectively among the deep shadows, in contrast to the open sunlit space of the court in front. The columns, though small in comparison with the monster shafts already mentioned, are still huge—huge enough to give dignity to the enormous space they surround. In type they are the lineal descendant of those found in the tombs of Beni Hasan a thousand years earlier, but time, and the consequent growth of ideas and desire for novelty, have developed changes not

altogether for good. The pillars of Beni Hasan were simpler in design, nearer to the natural form from which they were copied, namely, a sheaf of lotus stems bound together at the neck, the capital representing the cluster of buds. In those of Luxor the original form is nearly lost. Instead of four ribs there are now sixteen, and the incisions between them are slight ; and in addition to the single fillet circling the neck of the column, corresponding to the cord binding the stems together, there are two further series of bands round the body, which are not only meaningless but which interrupt the graceful lines of the clustered shafts. The development is one found in the life-history of every art. Nature, the fruitful source of inspiration and of models, is forgotten as time goes on, and new forms arise of man's ingenuity. The truth may be admitted even as it concerns these colonnades of Amenophis, the omen accepted, yet the beauty of them singly, and still more in mass, remains. If they signal doom, the doom is not yet.

Perhaps it may have fallen a century later. At any rate, passing back from the court of the XVIIIth dynasty, along the avenue, into the still greater court built by Rameses II. (1324-1258 B.C.), with all its magnificence, all its virility and power, we feel the end is a stage nearer—that mere size and grandeur are replacing the former beauty. Here there are no less than seventy-four columns, in double

row, surrounding a space of thirty thousand square feet. But the clustered form has gone, the shaft is smooth, less graceful, more massive ; and the capital surmounting it, though still retaining the bud-shape, is also smooth. A hundred years and more divide the court from that of Amenophis, but the difference is greater beyond measure than that. Possibly Rameses, in the rush and vehemence of his building—building, as no man before or since has built, in a hundred places from end to end of Egypt—had neither time nor inclination to give of his best to the completion of another king's temple. But even in his own the non-clustered columns are invariably used. Perhaps he was the victim of an age already past the zenith in matters of art ; perhaps some blame also rests with the man himself. Arch-builder though he was, he was also an arch-egoist. Temples which before had been given names appropriate to their high purpose, were now known by such designations as “Dwelling of Rameses in the house of Ptah”, in which the co-proprietorship of the king and his god was expressed with the most unblushing effrontery. This spirit lurks in his greatest achievements, and is often the sole motive of his lesser ones. What he gave to the gods of Egypt with one hand he took back with the other ; and what his fathers had given more humbly he usurped for purposes of self-aggrandisement. So that hardly a temple exists but

bears the name of Rameses II. on its walls or pillars. To satisfy such an appetite the smooth columns served well. Over their surface the royal ovals or cartouches of the king's name, and the royal contours of the king's person, could be freely and effectively displayed ; they were at once the decoration of the temple and the blazonry of the royal person.

Had he stopped here no great harm would have been done. But he stopped at nothing in his zeal for building. It is said that the almost total destruction of the monuments of the Middle Empire is due to the vandalism of the XIXth dynasty in general, and of Rameses in particular. He demolished temples wholesale in order to obtain the stone ready dressed, and save time and trouble. In this court at Luxor there is proof that he did not respect even buildings of his own age. If a single name in the annals of his country could have stayed his hand it would surely have been that of Thothmes III. to whom, more than to anyone else, the greatness and stability of Egypt were due, and whose name less than a century before had been one to conjure with in every quarter of the civilised world. Yet a granite shrine left by this king, in its original state beautiful, doubtless, as all his buildings were, stood in the way of Rameses' own pylon and colonnade, and was razed to the ground. True, it was rebuilt—with some of the sculptured stones turned inside out !

Yet the energy of the man ! Outside the temple he put six colossal statues of himself, two seated and four standing, the former of which are forty-five feet in height. In front of these again were two gigantic obelisks, wrought of the rose-pink granite of Aswan. Inside, between the columns of the court, are eleven more statues of himself, all worked in granite, ranging from seventeen to about thirty feet in height. The skill, the size, the lavishness of it all—these are still the features that strike one, not the beauty, or taste. Yet every visit to the temple brings the temptation to look afresh at the court of Rameses ; then to turn away and linger among the clustered columns of Amenophis.

Yet there is one thing, the least in all that court-yard of columns and statues, to see with reverence. Standing beside the colossus of Rameses, no higher than his knee, is the figure of Nefert-ari, his wife, carved out of the same block of granite. Demurely she stands, as though conscious of the privilege of a place even so humble, and fearful of dishonouring it. Yet men to-day look at the little figure, and forget the huge one overtopping it.

IV

A CITY OF RUINS

KARNAK

THE road from Luxor to Karnak passes first through the crowded habitations of the town and then into open level country, across which extensive views of desert and plain are forbidden by groups of date-palms and the rambling mud-huts of the peasantry. This, in the XVIIIth dynasty, was the lordly avenue from temple to temple, bounded on either side throughout its whole length by colossal sphinxes. Altogether there must have been two miles or more of these stone monuments marking the various approaches to Karnak. Of recent years many have been dug out of the accumulated sand, and still, sadly worn and mutilated, define the old road. There is nothing else to recall the former splendour, nothing even to quicken anticipation of what is left of it.

The ruins come unexpectedly. A turn of the road leads into a wide palm-grove, and at the end,

silhouetted against the bright sand and blue sky, stands a lofty gateway, alone, like a watcher of the place, its walls covered with carvings in bas-relief and surmounted by a cornice, in the hollow of which lie the widespread wings of the sun-disc. Immediately behind it, along a further lane of sphinxes, are seen the enormous pylon and sloping walls of a temple, little damaged by time, and away beyond that a vast plain of ruins, scattered and tumbled, not of one temple but of a city of temples. This is Karnak.

One day a lady, speaking of Egyptian temples, confessed to me that she thought them wonderful and very interesting, but that no one could call them beautiful. The criticism calls for mention not because it is reasonable or just, nor because it probably expresses the feelings of many tourists, but because it contains a certain element of truth, at least so far as it applies to the ruins, and not to the architecture. And both time and sympathy are often necessary to disentangle the one from the other, symmetry from discord, order from chaos. A casual visit to one of the more ruined temples, especially to an unpractised eye, maintains the first impression of dilapidation, confusion, of stones oddly shaped and oddly sculptured, and misses in the surrounding wreckage the things on which judgment must be passed. Perhaps there is in the style of architecture itself something which, if not repellent, is at least

so strange to modern eyes that a little effort and a little patience are necessary before an easy intercourse is established. The exterior of the temple is forbidding. Seen from afar it lies across the desert like some huge antedeluvian monster, which, by a law known to science, has acquired the colour of its environment. For, on a principle entirely the reverse of the Greeks, the Egyptians kept all their architectural display for the interior, and guarded it from without with walls unornamented—except for incut reliefs sprawling over the vast flat surfaces—and formidable as a prison's. The temple was not a place of public worship, but an oratory for Pharaoh and priest. Within, the carvings from floor to ceiling displayed the king and his concerns ; either he was represented making offerings to the gods, or receiving favours in return, or fighting and vanquishing his enemies. On days of festivals a privileged few were admitted into the courtyard, there to stand and gaze on as much as could be seen of the strange and gorgeous ritual. At other times king and priest performed their religious rites in the gloomy sanctuaries in secret.

There, to-day, temples and ruins stand in nakedness. In England our climate is kind to tumbled walls and traceries, crumbles them into picturesque shapes, and clothes them. In Egypt they lie as they fell—unblest, abandoned, desolate. The beautiful lake with its lotus-plants and water-

fowl, the garden with its date-palms and sweet-smelling herbs and flowers, brought as spoils from southern lands, and making the temple precincts a pleasure for the priests to walk in—these, the invariable adjuncts of former days, have passed, and now not a shrub or a blade of grass grows near. To eyes accustomed to Norman castles and Gothic abbeys, coloured, not bleached, by the years, and set in a green landscape, these ruins of the desert often seem more like stone-quarries of to-day than the venerable remains of antiquity. The feeling of disappointment is not unnatural, at least for a moment, until the mind becomes occupied with other thoughts, other concerns.

Such a field of ruins is Karnak. The view from the pylon of the main temple is like that over a city, but a city wrecked and overthrown. A scene so desolate, so deeply impressive of the vanity of human affairs, can hardly be imagined. There is nothing in the world like it, nowhere such a gathering of prodigious monuments scattered over an area so vast. In one direction for sixteen hundred yards, in another for over six hundred, pylons, walls, and obelisks lie strewn over the ground. The whole circuit of them, two and a half miles in extent, is marked here and there by stately gateways which serve to divide Karnak from the surrounding plain : and in between, in among the tumult and disorder, and still surviving it, are col-

umns, colonnades, porticoes, halls, even an entire temple, erect and almost uninjured.

Merely to inspect this assemblage of monuments and their wreckage is the work of a long day. The first visit is one continuous excitement, more than excitement—suspense. It is like travelling through a maze, in which the task is not to find one's way out, but to discover all the passages within, catch all the wonder. Every doorway, every turn in the path, opens on something new and unexpected : a cluster of pillars, a capital rich with colour, a sculptured wall, a row of colossal statues. Even the stones lying on the ground have interest ; on most there is carving, either part of a figure or hieroglyphics ; and always there is the size to rouse astonishment. For of these were the temples built, and, as in the case of the Pyramids, they give the measure in labour of the achievement ; they were the drums of columns, the abaci, the roof-stones, shaped to exact angles, or rounded to precise curves, and smooth as planed wood, and they weigh thirty, fifty, perhaps one hundred tons. Size and weight, when they are so enormous and have been so perfectly manipulated, must be counted in the sum of achievement. And at every stage, beside variety of form, there is an endless variety of style. For Karnak is a pageant in stone of the history of Egypt. From the Middle Empire, 2200 years B.C., right on to Ptolemaic times, through a space of more

than twenty centuries, the building went on, interrupted while the Shepherd Kings were in power, and then restarted with redoubled vigour—the vigour of the XVIIIth dynasty—and continued by nearly every succeeding Pharaoh. The wealth resulting from the world-wide conquests of Thothmes III. was largely bestowed on the Theban priesthood. There was nothing to hinder the growth of temples. Even Thothmes himself, with all his seventeen invasions of Asia, had time to give to the task, time for a pursuit which was to occupy men's minds like a passion for another hundred and fifty years, and which remained a national rule, followed with varying degrees of activity, for another thousand years. Every stage of the long period save one, when, under the Saïte princes, in the seventh century B.C., Egypt enjoyed a brief but glorious recrudescence of commerce and art, is represented in the monuments of Karnak. What is lost in unity is gained in variety ; what is lost in maintaining a level standard of excellence is gained in expressing the universal law of change, now forwards, now backwards, and in conveying a constant impression, not only of the ups and downs of art, but of the individuality of the artist.

Of the greatest of all this congeries of buildings it is almost impossible to speak in measured terms. He who has seen the wonder, felt it seize and possess him like a turbulent spirit, and would write

of it, had best take refuge under the ægis of Champollion, the father of Egyptology, who, writing home to friends, said : "If my expressions were to convey but a thousandth part of what I felt, a thousandth part of all that might with truth be said of such objects, if I succeeded in tracing but a faint sketch in the dimmest colours of the marvels of Karnak, I should be taken, at least for an enthusiast, perhaps for a madman". The words apply to Karnak as a whole, to the two and a half miles of scattered monuments, but they apply especially to the main temple, dedicated to Ammon, the first person of the Theban trinity, and to its great columned hall, which so far dominates all else as to have become synonymous in people's minds with the name Karnak.

The single temple from end to end measures one thousand two hundred and fifteen feet, its greatest width is three hundred and seventy-six feet, and the total circumference of its boundary wall is three thousand one hundred and sixty-five feet. Its own masonry covers more than ten acres of ground. All this grandeur and profusion of architecture grew up round the simple diminutive temple which, until the XVIIIth dynasty, had served the needs of the city. From that time onward, even when Thebes had ceased to be the royal residence, the kings of Egypt took delight in doing honour to the temple of Ammon, in

adding to its structure, in bringing new sculptures and ornaments, or in recording the special achievements of their reigns on its walls.

The standard set in the great age was maintained to the end, at least so far as size goes. How could a man be small when the vast spaces of Karnak were given him to build in, and the manner shown! The pylon, or gate-tower, which is the portal of the temple, is three hundred and seventy feet across, and, in ruins, reaches a height of one hundred and forty feet. It was built by the Ptolemies, and was among the last additions ever made to the temple, and may be taken, in its rugged but uncouth grandeur, as typifying the decline of national life and spirit, the end of a great race. Within the pylon is the vast open court, covering over two acres, along two sides of which are ruined colonnades. Here again is the great purpose, the magnificent scheming, but unfulfilled; probably projected at an age when fulfilment was not possible. But its storied stones are another landmark in Egyptian history. They were piled by a Pharaoh of the XXIInd dynasty (*circa* 930 B.C.), who was not an Egyptian in origin, but Libyan, of whom it is written in the history of another race, "And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, of the treasures of the king's house;

he even took away all". Elsewhere on the walls of Karnak is a sculpture in commemoration of the victory, conceived in the lurid manner of the age. The Pharaoh with one hand brandishes his sword over a band of precatory victims, representing the captured towns of Palestine, whom he holds by cords with the other; they grovel, and the king overtops them, like a god.

The court has other columns, one standing, many fallen, and two pedestals for colossal statues. But the huge enclosure needed a Rameses to occupy it, and the race of giants was passed. The size and emptiness, however, have their use. Here is breathing space. The hypostyle hall lies just beyond. It is like the moment when another step will gain the summit of the mountain and a new world open to one's eyes.

Further visits may moderate the emotion, as familiarity will, and bring other thoughts, even the calm to criticise, and the hardihood to admit blemishes; but the first sight of the great hall of Karnak produces a state of sheer astonishment. The experience is one which nothing else in the world can give, and which can never perhaps be recaptured. A Greek temple, a Gothic church, the perfect line of a poem—these possess the soul, but in peace; they have a dozen qualities, but above them all and embracing all is that of beauty. Karnak disturbs, bewilders, even a little oppresses. Its

reach is almost beyond human grasp, but it is in the direction of size, power, grandeur, not beauty; earthward, not heavenward. The effect is most like that produced by the tremendous sudden chords of the *Götterdämmerung*, which startle and amaze without satisfying. In the confusion of mind aroused analysis is not possible; one is as completely the victim of emotion as a child of credulity. But later, when judgment follows, and the earlier impressions are unravelled, it is found how instinctively true they were. The size and wonder of it remain. With Champollion we may admit the achievement is of giants, not men. But its failure is that the artist has attempted too much, strained his art to uses for which it was never intended, which it can never achieve. Beauty is there, but does not dominate the whole structure, and in the commotion of more blatant voices her benediction is lost.

Judged by the surge and confusion of one's feelings, this stupendous erection can be likened to nothing else familiar outside fairy-tales but the great doings of nature herself. A description of it would serve the needs of an epic rather than prose. Not only for its look of most hoary antiquity, its strangeness and remoteness of character, but far more for its colossal dimensions, beyond all experience and knowledge, it seems to own kinship with Homeric gods and the heroes of the Norse Sagas.

The first sight of the central aisle of columns at

once recalls the unfinished colonnade of Amenophis III. at Luxor : there are the same smooth circular shafts, terminating in the same inverted bell-shaped capitals. But the columns of the latter, gigantic as they were with their forty-two feet of upreared symmetrical stone, are small by the side of these monster pillars, which, with base, slab, and abacus, are nearly seventy feet in height. They are so finely proportioned, comparatively so slender, gradually and very gently tapering to the summit, that their colossal size is only in part realised. They are eleven feet in diameter, over thirty-three in circumference—each the size of Trajan's column in Rome. And from these “stalks” the great bell-flowers beautifully, almost lightly, open at the summit, with curved, unserrated lip, a lip that is seventy feet round, and encloses an area large enough to provide standing room for a hundred men. The dimensions must be named, but they are not the wonder, vast as they are. There is merit due to a race that could lift such mighty stones to a height of three-score feet and more, and place them accurately, securely in position. But the merit is more than this. The crowning achievement is in the realm of art, not of engineering. They took the gigantic mass of stone and gave it grace, beauty, fitting in dimensions, but also in curve and line, to crown columns huger than any race of men, before or since, has dared to use for architectural purposes.

The capital is not divided into petals, but its surface is decorated with conventional designs of lotus leaves and stems, carved in sunk relief and coloured; and coloured reliefs of gods and Pharaohs, of geometrical traceries at the base and royal ovals at the top, cover the entire column.

The avenue between the central columns extends from door to door of the hall for a distance of one hundred and seventy feet. On either side a row of lesser pillars, forty-two feet in height, with bud-shaped capitals, completes the support of the nave roof, their deficiency in height being compensated by small square piers which form, with a series of open gratings for the admission of light, a sort of clerestory. Beyond these again, columns of the lesser type, numbering in all one hundred and twenty-two, pass row after row to the north and south extremities. Among them the visitor wanders as in a forest. The pillars in height and girth have the dimensions of forest trees; they enclose the same wide spaces of light and shadow, changing, alternating with each step; and at every turn new avenues, narrowing in the distance, open up among them in a dozen directions, providing new combinations of contour, new sculpture, splashes of vivid colour that give to the sculptured rounds and hollows an indescribable richness, and impressing in all the constant sense of surprise, mystery, reverence.

The wonder remains everywhere and at all times.

But in some hours, and when experience has brought control, it is easy to criticise—as one criticises the view from a mountain, a landscape, a sunset, not at first, and humbly at last. In the fierce light of day certain faults cannot long escape notice. The columns are too near together; and their arrangement, due to the different sizes of the lesser ones in the wings and the huge ones of the central aisle, does not afford uninterrupted vistas down the length of the building; the lesser pillars are needlessly thick, and their bud-capitals unshapely; and the deep-cut relief which covers them, rich though it be, is often clumsy, too lavishly used, and with too little regard for decorative effect, by kings whose first concern was to inscribe their own name and title. But at evening these things are not seen. It is then that the great hall of Karnak, while preserving its first qualities of size and grandeur, is also most satisfying. By moonlight, again, there are new experiences of deeper, more moving import; but that is when nature and art, God's work and man's work, go hand in hand. In the evening it is only that the sculpture and colour of the architecture are seen more nearly under the conditions of light for which they were intended. Instead of sunshine streaming perpendicularly through the gaps in the roof, and cutting out the shapes of stone in hard contours, the light at that hour is diffused evenly through the whole interior, the lines become softer,

even the bizarre figures on the columns melt into a harmonious scheme of decoration, and the great shapely forms and great spaces of the temple acquire a vagueness which is more alluring, more wonderful than the gaunt, uncompromising truth.

The hall was the combined achievement of Seti I. and his son Rameses II. The former built the central aisle and the north wing, the latter the south wing. It is not difficult to distinguish between the sculpture of the two reigns. That of the latter is incised, coarser, well adapted to the uses of a king who was building throughout the length and breadth of the land and wished his lineaments and name to figure everywhere, in places provided and in places stolen. Under Seti, art awoke into new life. Its purpose was as serious, its method as skilful and refined as in the days of Thothmes III., a century and a half earlier. The most renowned work of his time is seen at Abydos, in the king's tomb at Biban el-Muluk, and in the hall at Karnak. It is executed in bas-relief, raised ever so little above the surface, yet the modelling is beautifully done, always escaping flatness, and there is life and vigour in the lines. But even Seti had abandoned the clustered column, like those in the court of Amenophis at Luxor. There was something wrong with an age, in spite of its fine mural sculpture, that could renounce the graceful form of an earlier generation for the

smooth, ungainly pillar favoured throughout the XIXth and later dynasties.

Beyond the hypostyle hall the ruin becomes more complete, more bewildering. Obelisks tower into the sky, colossal statues stand in rows or lie prone on the ground ; there are chambers and passages, emptied of their contents, roofless, dilapidated, lying in all directions, and, at intervals, preserving the central line of the temple, enormous mounds of stone left from wrecked pylons. Out of the jumble even Egyptologists cannot extract meaning or purpose. But in this part are the foundations of the original temple, and, further on, the last of the great buildings, is a temple still in good repair, which is perhaps the most beautiful of all that Karnak possesses. It was built by Thothmes III., the great soldier, early in his reign, while he was still gathering strength for the invasions of Syria-Palestine. Its main hall, which is about the size of the nave of Canterbury Cathedral, was known to folk of that day as "Thothmes III. is Glorious in Monuments", a name to which all civilised races three thousand years later can subscribe. There is something in this man's work which makes it less remote in spirit than the archaic productions of earlier and the more magnificent productions of later dynasties. It is less fantastic in decoration, less conventional in treatment. Among the beautiful pillars of this hall, exquisitely proportioned and effectively

spaced, and in the lesser chambers with their graceful clustered columns, one is brought face to face with another age, inspired by other ideals, and more free of soul to pursue them. A note of rebellion is sounded against forms and rules, which should rather be the support of small men than the fetter of great, in the columns of the central aisle. Their capitals are bell-shaped, but open downwards ; their shafts taper, but taper toward the base. Whether a joke or whether a stern lesson, it seems to anticipate and deride the rigid stereotyped habit which Egyptian art was destined to assume. But for the present art is free and catholic. It still rejoices in natural forms. A neighbouring hall, for instance, is decorated with bas-reliefs of birds, animals, flowers — wild-duck settling among the reeds, hawks poised on wing, cranes with the graceful curve of neck, gazelles in timid movement, and a whole garden of plants, arranged like an artist's studies in design, of some only single leaves, of others complete sprays of stalk, bloom, and leaf. They represent the fauna and flora which Thothmes had encountered in his Asiatic campaigns, specimens of which he brought back to enrich the temple gardens. Warrior though he was, and through all his nineteen years of warfare, he found time to build temples, and possessed the taste to make them beautiful.

From the temple of Ammon—this vast assemblage

of courts, pylons, halls, chambers, extending for more than four hundred yards—one may go in any direction and still come upon other temples, or ruins of temples, built in different ages to the honour of various gods and goddesses. Of many only the foundations remain ; wherever more is left, there is always something to interest. Two or three are so well preserved as to give a most vivid impression of an Egyptian temple in its entirety, and, except for the missing colour which played so important a part in architecture, in its richness and lavishness of detail. Such are the temple dedicated to the god Khons, standing in the corner of the enclosure of the great temple of Ammon, and a smaller temple which is entered from the courtyard of the latter. Both are late Ramesside in date, belonging to the XXth dynasty, 1200–1100 B.C. Decay was rapidly overtaking both the empire and its art, but the capacity for building on the heroic scale was not yet dead. The lesser of the two is entirely the work of Rameses III. It was never added to ; as the architect designed and planned it, so it remained. What is incoherency and meaningless ruin in the great temple, is here order and unity, each portion clearly revealing its purpose. Through the central portal is the open court, beyond it a hypostyle hall, lying transversely across the axis of the building, with eight columns arranged in two rows, and beyond that again the three chapels dedicated

respectively to the three persons of the Theban trinity, Ammon, Mut, and Khons, and two other chambers, used, doubtless, for the safe keeping of the vessels and other treasure. The ground-plan follows the usual strictly rectangular shape, and is about one hundred and seventy feet in length, about sixty in width ; and the elevation shows the customary declension in height from pylon to sanctuary, which is generally contributed to both by the raising of the floor and the lowering of the roof of each succeeding portion of the temple, so that the whole structure focusses toward the inmost room, the holy of holies. The same progression is made from light to darkness. The court was open to sky and air ; to the hypostyle hall light was only admitted through doorway and gratings in the roof, while the chamber of the god received only the few gleams that filtered through open doorways. Here the priests performed their mysterious rites in darkness and in secret. Yet even in the sanctuary the walls were covered from floor to ceiling with sculpture. Unlike the Greeks, the Egyptians appropriated every inch of smooth surface for carving figures and inscriptions. In Rameses III.'s temple the gain is seen in a certain lightness given to the massive architecture, and a universal and harmonious richness. But the most striking feature there is the use made of statuary in combination with architecture in the open court. It is perhaps

the crowning achievement of Egyptian architecture—one quite unequalled by other civilisations of the world—not so much that it made use of sculpture, from colossal statuary to the tiniest bas-reliefs, to an extent immeasurably beyond that of all other nations, but far more that the sculpture, great and small, was made an essential part of the structure, an essential element in the design, and fitted to every decorative need. How easy to have gone astray, to have been merely grandiose and vulgar ; and in reality what taste is shown, how keen a sense of appropriateness, proportion, style ! In front of each of the twenty piers, which form a covered colonnade on three sides of the court, stands a colossal statue of the king. A tasteless age would have carved him in the lineaments of a man—in what attitude, who shall guess ? but arms and legs will not be disposed of summarily. The Egyptians represented him in the form of a mummy, like the god of the dead, Osiris, swathed from the neck downwards, the arms crossed reverently over the breast, the whole figure impressive, dignified, restful. The effect obtained by these mighty Osiris pillars almost surpasses belief. As at Abu Simbel, one seems to be in an atmosphere of giants, environed with greatness and lavishness and richness conceived on the giant's scale, to feel the enchantment, the delight, but also to feel the repose.

For a circuit of two and a half miles one may go on, and in the size, the variety, the wealth, find some measure of the toil and achievement of Ancient Egypt, and, better still, something to keep for joy and reverence in after days.

V

THE TEMPLES OF THE WESTERN PLAIN OF THEBES

THERE can be nothing more delightful in life than the mornings spent among the western temples of Thebes. The Luxor hotels fit their arrangements with every consideration for the day's needs. They provide an early breakfast, and, without more trouble than the mere asking, they see that a donkey is waiting on the far bank to carry the tourist to whatever destination he chooses. What a choice it is ! Paths through a wide belt of cultivated valley lead in different directions to an edge of valley which is desert, and which stretches from left to right in little hillocks at the foot of a long range of Libyan hills, rising four hundred feet or more above the plain. Along this belt of desert lie at intervals, but within an easy circuit of three or four miles, half a dozen well-preserved temples, great and small, and as many more of which the foundations only are left, while the lower hills in the background are literally honeycombed with tombs of high officials,

who lived and were famous in the XVIIIth dynasty. In a deep ravine opening in the mountain chain still further eastward, and driving into the midst of its loftiest peaks, the royal tombs are situated. For Western Thebes was the site of the necropolis of the New Empire. The sun-god Ra travelled each day across the empyrean, and each night sank behind the Theban hills in the west ; to the west, too, must man go when his day of journeying was over—to the west, where, with his god, he should live again eternally in the green, ever-fertile fields of Earu. The hills provided the rock-tombs, the “Abodes of the Dead”, and on the narrow strip of uncultivable land the great temples were built by successive Pharaohs as cenotaphs in which the ritual of the dead might be performed and the material needs of the “double” or ghost furnished.

To be given two days for all this is, for the body, weariness ; for the spirit, tragedy. Only by making them long and arduous is a bare visit to each temple and a few chosen tombs possible. And, altogether apart from the fatigue and distraction of undigested sight-seeing, the three hours between noon and three o’clock are best spent resting. They are the hours of the heat and burden of an Egyptian day. Donkeys suffer, donkey-boys suffer ; and even though his own energy survive the strain, the visitor cannot take the pleasure entirely without concern for these. But if one have the time to apportion at

will, best of all the time to loiter—to have every day “half a day to spare” only because the other half has been full of effort, full of wonder, choke-full of delight—then the western plain is still the Elysian fields where those who are blest to go may find inexhaustible pleasure. For “there is no country”, says Herodotus, “that possesses so many wonders (as Egypt), nor any that has such a number of works which defy description.” And here they lie thickest on the ground. The monuments that surprised the Grecian into superlatives still crowd the plain and tunnel deep into the neighbouring hills.

The secret of enjoyment is to be selfish, persistently, perseveringly, studiously selfish; not to deny the very least to others, but to make sure of the utmost for oneself. It can be done without violating any Christian principles, merely by avoiding on certain fixed days the route scheduled for steam-boat parties, and on all other days by being abroad early, getting away to the other side before a hundred tourists begin their negotiations with a hundred donkey-boys, and by gaining the open plain before the dust is stirred and while the air is cool and fragrant. The rest is pure delight.

“Never the time and the place
And the loved one all together”

is a poet’s conceit, proven false. Here are all three. Peace is only disturbed by a bewilderment of

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choosing among good things, but choice cannot be wrong, and there is the heartening of a four-mile scamper through fresh green fields and through sunshine that dances and is not yet drooping with its own excesses.

The direct path leads to the southernmost group of temples known as Medinet Habu, from a village which was built there in early Christian days, the ruins of which lie in piles round the temple precincts, for in the climate of Egypt nothing perishes. It is the path that first allures all travellers on the western plain because half way along it stand the Colossi of Memnon, those giant statues which of all others, the Sphinx only excepted, most impress men with their gigantic proportions, their dignity, their awesomeness. They are the statues of Amenophis III., the builder of Luxor temple, the man whose spirit first soared in stone, who schemed in splendid palaces, splendid temples, and lived to give Thebes a glory befitting its world-wide empire. Here he built a temple, it is believed the most beautiful of all Egyptian temples, but not a stone is left standing. Only the two statues of the king which stood before the gate-towers remain. Rising to a height of over sixty feet, each hewn out of a single stone, they dominate the whole plain. Originally, before the crowns had fallen, the total height of statues and pedestal must have been seventy feet. The shoulders are twenty feet across, the fore-arm from

finger-tip to elbow over fifteen feet, the foot ten and a half feet in length, the middle finger four and a half feet. A giant of these days, standing on the pedestal and stretching his arm upward, would scarcely reach half way to the knee. It is in Egypt that one first realises what size is, and what it means, in architecture ; how solemn and how sublime a thing it is in sculpture. These twin statues of the plain seem not so much man magnified as the heroes of a giant race cast in stone. So the Romans thought them. They were not the statues of a mortal king, but of Memnon, son of Eos and Tithonus, whom Achilles slew at Troy. When the sun rose above the horizon the northernmost statue emitted a musical note. It was the slain Memnon greeting his mother Eos, the dawn. Men came from all over the world to hear the voice. Great Roman officials brought their wives ; the Emperor Hadrian, in 130 A.D., remained many days—waiting, listening. Dozens of inscriptions in Greek and Latin are carved on the legs of the statue, plain men scribbling their name and comment in prose, poets and poetesses rhapsodising in verse. In the third century A.D. the Emperor Severus restored the figure. Five layers of great sandstone blocks were built into the upper part of the body, clumsily built. The god was incensed, and for ever after remained mute. Severus had preserved the statue, but stilled the voice.

The faces have gone : who would wish them back again ? The temple, built in a glorious age, of which they were but an ornament, has also gone, with all its splendid decoration, all its treasure. So be it. Even for such loss there is recompense. Now, worn and featureless and unattended, the giant figures are so much the more impressive. They are no longer the presentment of a man, but an allegory carved in stone.

The temple-group of Medinet Habu, like Karnak, comprises buildings of many of the Pharaohs, and, after them, of Ptolemaic kings and Roman emperors. Of later work little remains beyond ruined pylons and foundations, and two graceful central columns of a portico which must have been among the most beautiful examples of Ptolemaic architecture. These stand out from the girdle wall which still divides the temple precincts from the surrounding desert, still shows with what jealous care the sacred buildings of Egypt were hidden from common gaze. Access to the enclosure is obtained by one of the most interesting of all ancient edifices. It is not a temple, nor, strictly speaking, is it Egyptian. It served as a palace for Rameses III., and was built in exact facsimile of the fortresses he had seen in Syria during his Asiatic campaigns. Possibly the king occupied it during periods of festival, when he could be at hand to participate in the high services held in the temple of his own building.

A little further away—the oldest ruin at Medinet Habu—stands a humble shrine of Queen Hatshepsut and her husband-brother, the great Thothmes, beautiful as all the work of the XVIIIth dynasty is. It consists of no more than an oblong cella surrounded by a colonnade of square pillars on the outside, rising from a parapet, and sixteen-sided columns within, and six small chambers, serving as sanctuaries, at the rear. There is taste in every stone, every line of it : in proportion and composition, in the deep-sunk hieroglyphs which make the sole external decoration, and, most of all, in the charming bas-reliefs covering the walls and columns of the interior, on which much of the rich colour of former days still remains. Thothmes, for some reason or other, probably because of the strong man's resentment at being kept so long out of single and undisputed possession of power, took pains, when he came into his own, to obliterate all marks of his consort's rule. The figures of the queen were chiselled out, and his name inscribed over hers in the various royal ovals or cartouches.

But Medinet Habu is Rameses the Third's. The great temple, around which the rest are clustered, is his from end to end. Dedicated to Ammon, as tutelary god, the king made it a monument to his own glory. Like a written history its walls record, by figure and hieroglyphic, the life and deeds of the king. There are the familiar turgid

inscriptions, the usual pæans sung by court chroniclers to the majesty of Egypt. On the outer walls are heroic scenes of hunting or of battle, scored with great vigour and skill. In one the Egyptian army is marching against the Libyans, a lion walking beside the king's chariot,—the hurly-burly of battle and its horrors,—victory, and more horrors, of wounded soldiers, the heaped-up dead, and the severed hands counted to twelve thousand and more, which measure the extent of victory. In another, Rameses is fighting the hordes of Northern Palestine, aided by his Shardana mercenaries, who were probably natives of Sardinia ; in another he wars with lions, his spears and arrows as surely aimed, success as sure, as in the case of all other Pharaonic combat. The most interesting scene of all is that of a naval battle—the first recorded in history—in which the king is represented shooting on the hostile fleet from land, and, later, receiving from a balcony, like kings of all ages, the conquering army and the plaudits of the multitude.

So are the vast surfaces of stone limned and scored with pictures of a Pharaoh's prowess. They are immensely interesting, not only historically, as depicting a great period of human history and representing graphically so many types and races of men, but because of their vigour and literalness, their downright thoroughness, and their charming naïveté. But, like most external mural sculpture, the work is

crude and rather coarse, the drawing careless, and the composition without either symmetry or cohesion.

Within, the temple is glorious even side by side with the best examples of an earlier and greater age. Never shall I forget the first, nor the next, nor any visit to Medinet Habu. Historians tell us that the sands of Egypt were now fast running out, that its power was waning, its own life falling through luxury and dissoluteness into decrepitude, and that the decadence of its art already foretells the end. Yet, standing in the vast spaces of the temple courts, among great columns, colossal sculptures, and surrounded by walls chiselled deep with a galaxy of figures and inscriptions, so that nowhere can the eye rest without beholding the richest decoration, both of line and colour—it is easy to forget history, to forget criticism, and just delight in what is. The faults are in detail, not in any abandonment of the precedents of scope and massiveness set in former days. Rameses III. worked on the grand scale of his forefathers. He set out to cover an area five hundred feet in length by about one hundred and fifty in width, in the lavish manner of Egyptian architecture. It seems incredible that a man could embark on such a task when the single hope of carrying it to completion depended on the time and capability available during his own life. Success, of course, was only possible under a system

of forced labour. The whole population was called out to work at the Pharaoh's bidding ; to which cause may be attributed the inequality of workmanship, and the carelessness and incompetency in construction which characterises so many temples. According to Mariette, for instance, the western pylon at Karnak fell because it was hollow, and as a consequence the inclination of the walls became a source of weakness rather than of strength. There are signs of haste and of carelessness in Rameses' temple, but the king lived to fulfil the task he had set himself. If he skimped the work anywhere it was in the hypostyle hall, which, instead of filling the whole width of the temple, loses greatly in impressiveness by being narrowed to make room for small chambers at either side. But in all else there is the spaciousness and massive grandeur of the old temples. The two huge courts, each faced by a pylon, are enriched with sumptuous colonnades, composed in some cases of bud-columns, in others of square piers, with colossal sculptures of the king in front of them ; and beyond the hypostyle hall are three smaller pillared halls, and a score or so chambers and passages. The scale and lavishness are those of a man who felt concern neither for time, money, nor labour.

The art may be decadent, nay, is. It possesses great vigour, variety, catholicity, but it lacks spontaneity and originality. It is at best a copy of the

virile work of Rameses the Second's time, nearly a century earlier. The exquisite sculpture of a still earlier day, of Seti and of Thothmes, when the laborious method of bas-relief was used for interior decoration, is as far away and as far higher as can well be imagined in the same race and the same age. Here an easier, rougher method is practised. Both figures and hieroglyphs are deeply incut, sometimes to a depth of four or five inches. Where formerly a whole line of delicately carved inscription would occupy a lintel or the face of a column, now the space is exhausted by three or four hieroglyphic signs, which are coarsely shaped, roughly executed. Yet what an indescribable effect of richness is obtained! It seems exactly what the massive construction of Egyptian temples needed, and especially needed when, in an age of decadence, massiveness had become a still more pronounced feature. For what was graceful before has now become ponderous. The square piers with their Osiris figures are a little less gainly than of old, but their proportions fit the huge courts around which they stand, and are appropriate to the enormous architraves they support. The columns are thick and stunted and their bud-capitals unshapely—both so far removed from the clustered column of Luxor that all traces of the natural form from which they were derived has gone. For such surfaces of wall and pillar the more heavily shaped hieroglyphs are

admirably adapted. They produce the effect of moulding and traceries in Gothic architecture, and relieve the great masses of stone from baldness and oppressiveness.

In the interior also all manner of scenes are represented. The age, one feels, had not the power to regenerate its art, but yet the wit to make the utmost of what it had. It is at least prolific and versatile. No corner is left unused; and, where a hundred feet or more of wall is available, that too is used, not finickingly, or timorously, but in the grand manner of former days. A single scene occupies the entire length of one wall of the second court, and passes on to the central doorway of the adjoining wall. It depicts a great festival procession in which the Pharaoh is borne on his litter, followed by dignitaries and courtiers, a priest who sings and other priests carrying censers, by soldiers and fan-bearers; while in front are the queen, a double row of priests, holding in their hands banners and the sacred furniture of the temple, and a white bull sacred to the god Min, whose festival it is. Elsewhere are other scenes of festival in honour of other gods. On a wall of the hypostyle hall, by way of variety, the vessels of gold given by Rameses for use in the temple, are depicted side by side. All the life, the enterprise, the achievement, not of a Pharaoh only, but of his day, are represented in the catholic art of Egypt.

On the way from Medinet Habu to a yet greater temple, the Ramesseum, and by keeping in toward the foot of the hills along a narrow track of desert, one comes unawares upon the most charming monument of all the Theban necropolis. Other temples are the object of a visit, their names are household words, their appearance is made familiar by pictures and photographs, and miles away their pylons advertise them to the world. The little temple of Dér el-Medineh has no such notoriety. It is lost sight of in competition with more clamorous attractions. Even to those that pass by it makes no show of its quality. It lies in a barren hollow of desert, entirely hidden within high walls of sun-baked brick, which seem so much a part of their surroundings, are so wholly without promise, that one might go on one's way without a single thought of curiosity.

Not often in any place on earth can surprise and pleasure come more bewitchingly. The shrine is a temple in miniature, so tiny that it might be tucked away into one of the halls of another temple. A vestibule replaces the usual open court, the roof of which has fallen in, so that the light streams freely upon a corniced balustrade and four floriated columns, which form a colonnade in front of the richly decorated façade, the latter pierced by three doorways leading to three tiny chambers. This is the entire temple, stretching from end to end not

more than sixteen yards. Capitals, pillars, walls, portals, all are sumptuously carved in the Ptolemaic style with miniature figures and mouldings, and the whole surfaces are still aglow with colour. After the huge edifices of Thebes there is infinite satisfaction to be found in the littleness of Dér el-Medineh. But between one and another of the former, it is only a half-way house, where the tourist may rest a while with pleasures they cannot give, and take breath for the next visit and the next astonishment.

And these follow, after another mile of hot desert, at the Ramesseum. If one might have one temple perfect as the builders left it, it would be this final and greatest achievement of the most prolific of all builders in history, Rameses II. Approached from the front the appearance is that of confused piles of ruined masonry strewn over a wide area of ground. The pylons and the walls and pillars of two large courtyards contribute to the wreckage, and, in the midst, like a fabulous leviathan, lies the fallen colossus of the king himself. This last must originally have towered high above all save the gate-towers of the temple. Though the figure was seated its height was nearly sixty feet, its total weight nine hundred tons. It now lies in three or four huge blocks on the ground. As I set about taking a photograph, the gaffir of the temple, a tall Arab, clambered on to the decapitated head and seated himself com-

fortably in the hollow behind one ear. The chest from shoulder to shoulder measures twenty-three feet, the arm at the elbow is seventeen and a half feet in circumference, the first finger is over three feet in length, the finger-nail seven and a half inches. But, broken as it is, the sculpture is evidence of the extraordinary skill acquired by the Egyptians in working stone. The great curves and hollows of the limbs are finely modelled, and over the whole surface an astonishing degree of polish has been obtained.

Round the piles of wreckage many pillars of the second of the two great courts are standing, with the stones of the architrave carved and coloured across them, Osiris statues of Rameses, thirty-one feet in height, before each pillar. They serve to show the enormous scale on which the temple was built. Its plan was copied almost exactly by Rameses III. in Medinet Habu, but the Ramesseum is much larger in all dimensions; indeed, in size it ranks second only to Karnak. But the latter is the work of a dozen kings through fifteen centuries; a mortuary temple is the work of one king, a man's own monument in his own name, designed for the performance of services necessary for his own peace hereafter. How could a single man, even though he were Rameses the Great, vie with Karnak! Yet the splendid example of Karnak was before him; he himself had completed the hypostyle hall, left only

three-parts finished by his father, Seti; he had seen and realised its magnificence, great beyond all the monuments of his ancestors, and his aim was, so far as lay in the limit of a lifetime, to emulate the example.

Where he fell short in size, he succeeded in beauty. The hasty, careless, always heroic, but generally coarse workmanship was well enough for the additions to the temples of previous kings—well enough to parade his own glory and perpetuate his name and titles—but for this temple, his own inalienably, only the best was acceptable. Five rows of columns of the great hypostyle hall and a complete lesser hypostyle are left to show his achievement. Originally the great hall—not like the decadent form at Medinet Habu, which lost immeasurably by stretching only two-thirds across the temple—stretched almost the whole width, its roof supported by forty-eight columns in eight rows. Their arrangement and their style are those of Karnak, but in design they are much more beautiful. The columns of the central aisle, with the expanded calyx-capitals, are thirty-six feet in height, little more than half that of the Karnak pillars; the bud-columns of the side-wings are twenty-five feet. As the clustered columns of Thothmes are perfection after their kind, so are these of the Ramesseum after theirs. In design they come between the stumpy pillars of Medinet Habu and the lofty pillars of Karnak; but they especially

differ from the latter in tapering much more rapidly, and in the wide sweep of their capitals. The roof over them still remains along a considerable portion of the central aisle. Up there lies beauty beyond all else in Egyptian ruins. The curving, outspread capitals, exquisitely traced with designs of lotus stems and buds, abaci and architraves sculptured with deep-cut hieroglyphs, and overhung on one side by a rich concave cornice, and above all a ceiling carved with a fine sweep of vulture-wings—these for shape and contour,—and on all a harmony of rich colouring, golds and blues, softened and mellowed by age, produce an effect of extremest beauty. Out of the surrounding confusion rises this single ordered group. A little distance away the Ramesseum promises nothing, and gives this. Rameses, with sins of vandalism heavy on his head, is redeemed by the testimony of this one corner of the monument he devised to keep green his memory.

The leap from the Ramesseum to the temple of Dér el-Bahri is the biggest one can take among the monuments of ancient Egypt. In time it is only across two centuries, from the XIXth back again into the early days of the XVIIIth dynasty ; but the differences in character are wider than any years can measure. A temple of King Menthu-Hetep of the XIth dynasty (2500 B.C.), not far away under the same line of hills, seems to have been the proto-

type of Dér el-Bahri ; but the former is so completely ruined that its interest is no longer spectacular, and the temple built by Queen Hatshepsut, sister and co-regent of Thothmes III., is now, in style and design, entirely unique among Egyptian monuments. Except for the sculpture on its walls, the temple bears no resemblance to the other sacred buildings. Its situation is extremely beautiful. Lying at the foot of hills that rise sheer upward for four hundred feet, and constructed in three terraces where the hills slope gradually to the plain, the slender colonnades of the temple appear to support the whole weight of the cliffs overhead. Its own columns are whitish, like mellowed ivory ; the rocks all round have the lustre of burnished gold or copper—neither red nor brown, but a subtle blending of both, and of every hue and shade of both, as the degree of light varies from minute to minute on the scarred and riven surface. Above is a canopy of blue sky, nowhere so blue as here. It is the situation, its novelty and picturesqueness, and this exquisite contrast of colour, even more than the beauty of the temple, which give Dér el-Bahri its high place in popular regard.

Yet the temple is among the most beautiful buildings in Egypt. It was born in an age that was capable only of beautiful things. Not yet was the XVIIIth dynasty (1545–1350 B.C.) old enough to have established records in many departments of

life and thought, but after the death of Thothmes I. and the succeeding brief reign of his son Thothmes II., which was spent in internecine struggle, it launched straightway into greatness under the rule of Queen Hatshepsut and her half-brother and husband, Thothmes III., and produced a succession of brilliant Pharaohs—soldiers, builders, statesmen, and, last of all, a philosopher in the person of that remarkable man, Amenophis III., who has most aptly been described as the first individual mind in history—produced these, and under their regency gave Egypt the first place among the nations of the world in material power and art.

Queen Hatshepsut inaugurated the new era with her temple, "Most Splendid of All", in an amphitheatre of the Theban hills. Its three terraces, connected by wide, sloping paths, pass one behind another, each surrounded in part by double colonnades, open to the light, open to the view of all men for miles round. Behind the pillars of the middle terraces are chapels and chambers either built or tunnelled in the hillside. On the upper terraces are many halls and vestibules, and in the middle of its west wall a high portal leads to a succession of chambers, which constitute the holy of holies, running into the heart of the rock. The pillars are graceful in proportion, some of them square, others sixteen-sided, and both the former

and the walls behind them, except when the continuity is broken by doorways leading into chapels, are covered with sculpture in exquisitely raised relief. The whole material of the temple is limestone, yellowed with age where the sun falls on it, still dazzling white in places of shade, and in either instance providing a surface on which the rich pigments of Egyptian art, faded or vivid, are displayed in astonishing beauty.

We are told of Hatshepsut that she, “the Divine Consort, adjusted the affairs of the two Lands by reason of her designs ; Egypt was made to labour with bowed head for her”. Her own party in the state was strong, for in her veins flowed the unmixed blood of the Pharaohs ; but the days of her reign were occupied in maintaining the throne, or at least something more than a merely ornamental share in it, against the power and intrigue of an envious brother and husband, and of his party. Yet withal she held supreme rule for long against Thothmes and his adherents, and, with a fine disregard of danger at home, found occasion to dispatch a peaceful embassage to the land of Punt, situated on the Red Sea coast—the El Dorado of those days, wherein abounded great treasure of myrrhs and balsams and sweet-smelling spices, of luscious fruit and strange animals. A fleet of six ships was sent, and in due time returned to the quays of Thebes laden with merchandise, animals,

and plants, with spices distilled, and with the trees that yielded them.

The whole length of a colonnade at Dêr el-Bahri is carved with representations of the expedition. In bas-relief cut with the most consummate skill, never raised more than one-third of an inch, and yet always exquisitely modelled and always avoiding the least appearance of flatness, every scene and every incident of the occasion is portrayed. There are the ships with their intricacies of delicate cordage, their crews and their merchandise, and in the waters below the fishes of the Nile and the Red Sea ; there are the arboreal huts of Punt, the trees and plants, spices mounded in heaps, wild and domestic animals ; and, in one, the most beautiful scene of all, a group of cattle under the wide-spreading boughs of a tree, moving in solid phalanx, all save one or two which stop to browse. The decorative effect of such delicately carved work in a medium richly toned like that of the stone of Dêr el-Bahri is extraordinarily rich, but also the detail in every line is wonderful for its truth to nature, its feeling for beauty, its chased and skilful craftsmanship.

The "Punt" colonnade is the best the temple has to give, but only where time has defaced the sculpture is there any lack of fine work. After wandering on past blank or shattered walls, what a delight to come on the sculpture and colour of the

sacrificial hall ! In four rows, one above another, a procession of men and maidens is portrayed, each bringing a suitable offering for sacrifice. One bears a chalice of wine, another a spray of lotus or a salver of fruit, another leads a gazelle, which picks its steps daintily after the manner of its kind, and yet another drags a bull-calf which half playfully, half rebelliously strains at the leash. The figures are about one-fifth of life-size, carved in low bas-relief, every detail of attitude, expression, and clothing being treated with feeling and sincerity. It is a fine example of an art that overlooked nothing, disregarded nothing, that accepted everything in life and human experience as suited to its needs in making beautiful the walls of the great national monuments, whether temple or tomb.

The usual religious representations also cover many of the walls and columns of Dêr el-Bahri. They follow the old lines, the old conventionalities, and are therefore so much the less valuable as art. Their interest lies in the subject. It is not a little surprising to find beneath those strange bizarre figures of men and repellent figures of gods, wrought by hands three thousand years ago, ideas so near to our own day. A whole colonnade of the central terrace of the temple is given to scenes referring to the procreation and birth of the queen. Ammon, the chief person of the Theban trinity, is shown in converse with Ahmose, the queen-mother;

he confides to her the secret—their secret, the god's and the young queen's; and leaves her with the promise, "Hatshepset shall be the name of thy daughter (yet to be born) . . . she shall exercise the excellent kingship in this whole land". Other deities and magi come with their blessings and their offerings at the birth; and when the child has advanced to girlhood, the scene, a score times repeated, represents Hatshepset in the presence of Ammon, the god's hand resting on her shoulder—the beloved daughter in whom he is well pleased.

At Dér el-Bahri one's eyes weary, not of the good things, but of the strain of gazing at them in dazzling sunshine. In this respect it is not so much a visit to a temple as to a picture-gallery. How the sun beats on the white walls, and how brilliantly the colours glow and burn, as though they had been gathering the light all these centuries! The cliffs above are too bronzed to be glaring, and there is rest in looking up at them, and beyond them into the intense blue depths of the sky. The scenery of the desert may repel or not, weary or not, but this one morsel of it—the colouring, the conformity, the lofty, rugged amphitheatre of rock, its wildness tamed, as it were, by the presence of the graceful, fairy-like palace at its base—must please the most fastidious and narrow taste. An age of taste chose it, rose to the choice, and all visitors to Dér el-Bahri approve it.

WESTERN TEMPLES OF THEBES 101

Only one other temple is left on the western plain. It is but a vestige of the original building founded by Seti I., the father of Rameses the Great. Two pylons and two large courts have gone, leaving no more than foundations to attest the former size and design; hypostyle hall, chapels, and many small chambers, arranged on a plan quite unlike that of other temples, are still well preserved. In these, better than in the great hall at Karnak, may the work of father and son be compared. In Seti's reign the art of mural sculpture was carried to perfection. Here, as at Abydos and in the tomb at Biban el-Muluk, every figure and every inscription is carved in bas-relief, little raised above the surface, yet so skilfully graduated as to delude the eye into the belief that the figures stand out in the full rounds and eminences of the natural body. Every detail of elaborate clothing, hanging free or fastened in folds, bears its appropriate relation to the surface of the figure. In the carving of inscriptions lapses might be expected; in most other times lapses were the rule. But the sculptors of Seti's day never relaxed in the most trivial details. Each hieroglyphic sign, god or owl or geometrical figure, has a character of its own and is executed with exquisite skill. The infinite pains of covering a wall in this wise, but also, one must feel, what joy in the craft! Then turn to the same figures, the same hieroglyphs of Rameses' time. Only a few years divide them,

and the wonder is that such decadence was possible, not in a few years, but through the course of a whole dynasty. He was son enough to complete the building his father had left unfinished, but he fought against time, and there fought with him an overweening egotism. He had half the temples of the land to rebuild or restore, bare walls and pillars throughout Egypt waiting to receive his name, and he elected to use just those methods which a man of finer taste would have eschewed, but which served to fulfil his purpose most effectively.

VI

THE TOMBS OF THEBES

I. ROYAL TOMBS

ALL the silence, all the dreariness, all the heat and glare of the desert are concentrated in the mountain valley of Biban el-Muluk, the cemetery of three dynasties of Pharaohs. From the death of Thothmes I., the founder of the XVIIIth dynasty, in 1515 B.C., to the end of the XXth dynasty in 1100 B.C., when the long and glorious line of Theban princes came to an end, it was to this place that the nation carried its great dead. The valley opens far along the western plain to the north, beyond the high shoulder of cliff which forms an amphitheatre for the temple of Queen Hatshepsut, and, winding for three miles into the heart of the Libyan hills, ends abruptly in a deep basin of rock chiselled out of the loftiest and most rugged peaks. Across the river, in the midst of fertile plains, lay the scene of the Pharaohs' temporal power, the Thebes of the living; this desert fastness—the one spot unchallenged by that

power—was given wholly to the dead. There is not a blade of grass within sight, not a lichen or tuft of moss to disguise the bare, ugly fact of death, not a creeping thing to relieve its loneliness, not the chirrup of a bird to break its silence. With that remorseless logic which characterises so much of their life and art, the Egyptians bore their deceased kings away from the green valley and laid them in this place to which nature had denied every other use.

To-day we call the sepulchres of Egypt rock-tombs. To the folk of those days they were Abodes of the Dead. They were not graves to cover lifeless mummies, but dwellings for those who, being dead, yet lived. For the Egyptians held stolidly to the belief that existence did not terminate with the last breath, but that human life ended only to make a divine, eternal life possible. The corruptible body was represented in the mummy, on which such elaborate precautions were expended to obviate the course of nature, such pains bestowed in order to ensure it from sacrilegious hands—for it would one day rise again, and live. But meanwhile the indestructible parts, not one but many, had been set free, and were in the unfettered enjoyment of the new and fuller life. Besides the soul, Ba, which most nearly corresponded with our own idea of the immortal in man, and which was figured as a human-headed bird, free to pass backward and forward

between the mummy in its shaft and the gods in heaven, these included, as the most important of all the component parts, the Ka, or "double"¹. The double was the divine counterpart of the deceased, intangible and invisible, yet like to him in form and feature. It carried on the dead man's life beyond the grave, or rather in the grave, worked as he had done, ate and drank the same food and wine, found pleasure and recreation in the same amusements and sports. It was a personality without being a person ; it was a spirit, yet sensuous ; divine, yet material. It was that part of man which still inhabited the earth, and its habitation was the tomb, the "abode of the dead".

All the lavishness and splendour and pomp of the rock-hewn sepulchres were provided solely for the benefit of the double. The mummy was sunk deep in its well ; the single care was to preserve it uninjured till the spirit returned, and human personality was again made perfect—perfect for eternity. But the Ka lived and moved, and the chambers and corridors of the tomb were given for the purpose. This, indeed, was a king's chief concern in life, for

¹ In addition to the soul and the double, the Egyptians recognised three more constituent parts in human personality : the Ab, which was the ghost or double of the heart, and which, being divinely pure, would stand forth as the man's accuser on the day of judgment ; the Khaib, the shadow ; and the Sahu, the empty hull of humanity, yet immortal. See Wiedemann's *The Ancient Egyptian Doctrine of Immortality*.

no sooner had he gained the throne than preparation was made for the tomb in which sooner or later he must be laid. The Egyptians knew the uncertainty of life ; their moralists taught, with Hamlet, "The readiness is all". "Put this aim before thee", says Any; "to reach a worthy old age, so that thou may be found to have completed thy house which is in the funeral valley, on the morning of burying thy body. Put this before thee in all the business which thine eye considers. When thou shalt be thus an old man, thou shalt lie down in the midst of them. There shall be no surprise to him who does well, he is prepared ; thus when the messenger shall come to take thee, he shall find one who is ready. Verily, thou shalt not have time to speak, for when he comes it shall be suddenly. Do not say, like a young man, 'Take thine ease, for thou shalt not know death'. When death cometh he will seize the infant who is in the mother's arms as he does him who has made an old age".¹

A single chamber, or at most two, sufficed for the double of an ordinary person ; but a Pharaoh had inhabited palaces in life, had known the grandeur and the freedom of spacious rooms and lavish appointments, and these his Ka must enjoy in the tomb. So the king set about providing them. Like the pyramids of his great forefathers, and the temples of his own day, the rock-hewn sepulchre

¹ Petrie's *Religion and Conscience*, p. 129.

admitted of almost unlimited scope. With every year of his reign he could tunnel further and deeper into the ground, add a corridor or flight of steps, and throw out chambers and recesses until, in the end, a complicated system of rooms and passages was achieved which typified the mysterious journey of the soul in the underworld. Endless trouble was taken to guard against plunder. When Belzoni, in 1817, entered the tomb of Seti, he suddenly came upon a deep well occupying the whole width of one corridor. Beyond was a blank wall, formed to all appearance of the natural rock. He descended into the well by means of ropes, but found it entirely empty. It seemed as if this were the limit of the tomb, and this the mummy-shaft from which some earlier plunderer had removed the precious contents. But something in the blank wall aroused his suspicions; he made further investigations, with the result that the deeply sunk well and the rock beyond proved to be only devices intended to stay further search.

One day, as I stood near this same tomb of Seti, a stout, elderly gentleman emerged from its mouth. He sat down on a stone hard by, mopped his perspiring brow, and looked furtively about, like one seeking to avenge a wrong. The dragoman stood beside him, perplexed, silent, ill at ease. There was not a sound; not a movement, save of the mopping handkerchief, which was lifted fitfully, as though

serving a mental rather than a physical need. Every sign pointed to a storm—our little portion of atmosphere was heavy with the portents—but when would it break?—here it must be, but on whom? As I wondered, four other figures came forth from the mountain, and slowly gathered round the silent form seated on the stone. Then flashed the lightning on each in turn, then the thunder—a single clap—on all: “No more tombs for me!”

And this was a criticism on the tomb of Seti I. Hot and airless it is, but heat and stuffiness seem little enough to pay for a sight of the underground palace designed for the Ka of Seti. The king who had built half the great hall of Karnak and the beautiful temples at Abydos and Kurna, who had at his bidding all the resources of Thebes when Thebes was at the zenith of its power, withheld nothing in order to make his sepulchre worthy of himself and his age. It extends for nearly five hundred feet into the rock, gradually descending by flights of steps and sloping passages to a depth of one hundred and eighty feet. In all there are fifteen halls, chambers, and corridors. The great hall at the end of the tomb, from which a staircase leads to the mummy-shaft, is divided into two portions, one with a flat roof supported by three pairs of square pillars, the other with a widely vaulted ceiling. Around it three large recesses and a spacious chamber (the latter enriched with a fine corniced

shelf cut out of the rock on three sides) pass out through separate doorways, and beyond is a long narrow hall with four piers which, though completely hewn, was left entirely undecorated.

Thus for five hundred feet corridor succeeds corridor, one separated from another by a flight of steps or by a buttress of rock, and chamber succeeds chamber, each different in shape and design. But the wonder is that all the thousands of square feet of wall and pillar, from the entrance of the tomb to its mummy chamber, are carved and painted. The tomb of Seti is a picture-gallery of Egyptian art. Every figure of god and Pharaoh, every one of those mysterious designs of strange serpents and genii which played their part in the religious belief of the time, and all the tens of thousands of hieroglyphics are sculptured in delicate bas-relief and richly coloured. It is almost impossible to lay one's figure on an uncarven surface. Where inscriptions and figures end, a frieze of papyrus bundles completes the decoration. The ceilings are not carved, but everywhere painted with scenes and designs taken from the sacred books.

The sculptures represent the soul's journey in the underworld, through the twelve regions which are the twelve hours of the night. It was accomplished by boat, along the river of death, for to the Egyptian, dependent on the Nile as he was for every need of life, no other means of transit seemed

possible. At each stage there are demons to be pacified, demons to grapple with and overcome. Through all the perils and difficulties the soul travels armed only with texts from the sacred writings. They are inscribed on the walls, they were written on papyrus and placed in the coffin, they were carved on the inside and outside of the mummy cases—as often repeated as the means of the deceased person could provide. For on these depended the success of the journey. The new and terrible emergencies which arose on every hand could only be combated by the special formulary devised for the occasion. It is a wonderful hotch-potch of superstition, ingenious fancy, and incoherent and incompatible ideas, but on the walls of Seti's tomb it provides material for a bewildering display of elaborate and varied design and an absolutely astonishing scheme of colour. The soul's progress is shown according to various religious scripts, for the Egyptians seemed never to feel the wearisomeness of endless reiteration. Besides, was there not an incredible length of surface to cover? Illustrate fully as they might, the material of one bible could hardly suffice. But the artist, whether he belied or not the claims of religious service, never neglects an opportunity for decorative effect. Even the gods of the dead and the genii of the underworld he could, on occasion, make to serve the needs of a frieze.

Description fails to convey any notion of the impression aroused by this subterranean palace of art wrought by Seti for the dwelling of his Ka, and not of this one only, but of most of the other forty odd tombs which tunnel the hillside and dive into the level ground in every direction. None is less than two hundred feet in length, many are nearly three hundred ; and that of Rameses III.—he who reigned in an age of decadence, yet used its waning strength to such purpose—is over four hundred, and magnificently spacious in plan. In each, the walls are more or less covered with pictures and inscriptions from the sacred books. But to see one is not to see all. The differences in the use of material, in style, in design, mark the history of Egyptian art, written unconsciously by sculptors and painters over four centuries of its course, forward to its zenith and backward to its decay.

How it was done ; how in all these rock-tombs (“pipes,” the Greeks called them, to convey a notion of their vast length) work so exquisite in line, so rich in colour, was ever achieved ; whence came the light ?—these are questions which excite the curiosity of all who come to see, and still seem unanswerable or only partially answerable. Whatever the light, whence came the infinite patience ? To run one’s finger over a hieroglyphic in the tomb of Seti ; to find an owl or a jackal no higher than two inches, yet sculptured in bas-relief so

perfectly that every member of the body and every feature of the face is delineated—that each animal is a personality ; and to realise that these and other signs are repeated thousands of times over, in addition to symbolic designs and figures of gods and of the king, life-size and in miniature, is to discover still more searching questions, and to feel deeper wonder. And all this patience and skill was exercised solely for the benefit of the double. When at last the king was laid in his tomb, the door was sealed up with rocks and debris, and it was the pious hope of the deceased that the shifting sands of the desert would hide his place of rest for evermore. How successfully the secret has been kept is proved by the fact that men trained in the work are year by year surveying the valley of tombs, probing and digging for the purpose of bringing new discoveries to light, and that, with all the means necessary at their service, only once in a while does success reward their efforts. The Egyptians dug their graves, and hid their bodies, as they had built their pyramids and temples—for eternity.

II. TOMBS OF OFFICIALS

The hills behind the Ramesseum, overlooking the Theban plain and the Nile, are honeycombed with the tombs of high dignitaries of the XVIIIth dynasty. They open yawning mouths at one's feet

or stand in sober rows, like the tunnels of a quarry, beside the tracks which wind in every direction up the face of the rock. A day among them is a day full of surprises and excitements, much like those which the excavators experienced when they first unearthed the openings and first looked inside. A few of the better known lie in the beaten path between Dêr el-Bahri and the Ramesseum ; the remainder, to the number of a hundred and fifty or thereabouts, hang along the mountain-side, unnoticed by guide-books and little visited by tourists. They are all constructed on a similar general plan : a doorway leads into the middle of a long chamber, which runs parallel to the hill-face, and a second room or corridor, opening opposite the entrance door, passes backwards at right angles into the rock, the whole resembling roughly the letter T. In size and condition they vary considerably. The chambers of one may be fifty to seventy feet in length, of another only fifteen or twenty ; a peep through the door reveals one merely a hulk, shorn of all its decoration, the next is aglow with vivid colour.

There is, therefore, in these tombs of viziers, generals, high priests, and royal architects, none of the imposing grandeur which characterises the sepulchres of Biban el-Muluk, neither is there the oppressiveness of grandeur nor the stiffness and conventionality. The Pharaoh was a divinity, and his

tomb betrays the aloofness of a divinity ; the rest of mankind were merely human flesh and blood, and their place of repose carries the general impress of this world. A touch of sorrow there must be ; but in life there were joys enough—joys of work and achievement, joys of the chase, of song and dancing, joys of the lotus flowering in the reed-beds of the Nile and of the wild fowl nesting among them ; and these they brought with them to the tomb, to make its solitude friendly and to give perpetual occupation and relaxation to the double of the dead man. The note of grief is sounded in the inscriptions which tell of the burial, of the desolation of widow and children, and of the sorrow of friends. They bring us near to the folk of those days, touch the springs of sympathy, when we can look on the splendid monuments of Pharaohs coldly from a distance. Thus the wife speaks as she embraces the body of her husband for the last time : “ I am verily thy sister, thou great one, do not forsake me. . . . Why is it that thou art far from me, thou who didst love to jest with me ? thou art silent and dost not speak.” Further away rise the lamentations of relatives and friends : “ Woe, woe, . . . alas, this loss ! The good shepherd has gone to the land of eternity ; he who had so much society is now in the country which loves solitude ; he who so willingly opened his feet to going, is now bound and confined. He who had so much fine linen, and so

gladly put it on, sleeps now in the cast-off garments of yesterday.”¹

But even the solemn ritual of the dead was not allowed to proceed without that admixture of lighter elements which characterise similar occasions in other races and in later times. The few weep at heart, the many are participating only in a ceremony, and relieve its tedium with joviality or with brutish ribaldry. The mourners applaud the antics of the dancing women, and listen with approval to the harper and his song. And as an anticlimax to the piteous invocation of the wife, the singer now makes his invocation, suited to the new spirit of the proceedings : “Celebrate the good day, provide ointment for thyself and fine oil for thy nostrils, and wreaths and lotus flower for the body of thy beloved sister, who sits at thy side. Let song and music come before thee. Cast all sadness behind thee, think on joy until that day comes when man arrives in the land where the people keep silence”.² This is the signal that lamentation and sorrow must cease, that drinking and revel must follow.

Merriment, indeed, and light-heartedness on all occasions were characteristic of the ancient Egyptians, as the scenes on the walls of the tombs show in their naïve and convincing way. Brugsch

¹ Erman, *A Handbook of Egyptian Religion*, p. 137.

² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Bey¹ animadverts strongly on opinions to the contrary long held by historians, who took the number and variety of funerary monuments in Egypt to imply that the people were grave, morose, and exclusive, and that their life was a long thought and preparation for death. In reality they feasted much, drank wine and other fermented liquors habitually, loved music and the dance, delighted in every manner of sport, indulged in jokes and chaff, avoided self-denial, and altogether approved so well of this world that one of their common supplications was for old age, "the perfect age of one hundred and ten years".

It is this gladness of the race which, in addition to garish colour and quaintness of decoration, give the tombs on the hillside a piquancy as of native wine, freshly pressed from the grape. They are like a chapter of Pepys, thrown off as laughter or an idle word is, without pose, and with never a thought for the verdict of criticism. All that the Egyptian knew and enjoyed in life, he painted on his tomb walls. These things had been his occupation and joy, they must therefore be accorded to his double after him, or rather not the things themselves, but the "double" of them; for as the double, the Ka, was a ghostly entity, so it needed not material objects, not bread and meat for food, not the sickle and ploughshare for work, or birds

¹ Brugsch Bey, *Egypt under the Pharaohs*, p. 41.

in the river marshes to provide sport, but only the pictures of them. Its bliss in the solitude of the tomb lay in the sights that flashed across the inward eye, and satisfied.

So these sepulchres supply a bioscopic picture of the life of the times. They show how the persons of importance lived, the things about which they cared and with which they desired to be associated in death, and incidentally they show by a hundred trivial records the ways and customs of lesser folk which otherwise would have perished with the nameless dead. Food and drink, naturally enough, play a large part in the representations, but they are always devoid of grossness. Slaves on bended knee offer plates of fruit, or chased flagons of wine, or vases of precious ointment; or they bring for meat, not the hideous dismembered limbs of commerce, but birds with the plumage still on them, and deer led by the leash. A table of offerings is piled high with cakes and fruits, and decorated with flowers of the lotus—there is plenty and variety, for the needs of the double last long, and there is no fresh source of supply. Sometimes gracefully attired maidens come to the deceased, laden with sprays of lotus and papyrus, and come with tambourine and lute to give him music so dear to Egyptian ears, then and now.

In the little tomb of Nakht, a vizier of the XVIIIth dynasty, the whole life of the country

gentleman is portrayed. The first chamber is so small that the light from the doorway floods it in every corner ; the colour on the walls must be as brilliant as the day, more than thirty centuries gone, when the tomb was closed, as it was believed, to all mortal gaze. Besides the usual offerings, the scenes represent Nakht with his wife seated at their repast, while a harper plays to them ; birds being snared, wine being pressed ; Nakht himself fowling, and spearing fish ; and, along an entire wall, a field in harvest-time, every incident of which is faithfully given, from the labour of ploughing and delving, sowing and winnowing the grain, reaping and gleaning, to the respite from work enjoyed by the harvester who drinks from a wine-skin suspended from the branch of a tree.

These harvest scenes, so peculiarly instinct with the life and genius of the race, are always the most pleasing. The high dignitary was often the master of the king's granaries, and the walls of his tomb are covered with pictures connected with his office, pictures of land-surveying and of land-measuring, of the corn being weighed, and of fruit being plucked from laden branches. Scenes of Arcady ! While the labourers work a youth goes from one to another with a cup of wine, or a musician plays the lute to gladden their task. The ploughman sings at his plough : “ ‘Tis a fine day, we are cool, and the oxen are drawing the plough ; the sky is doing as we

would ; let us work for our master ". Others reply in antiphony : " 'Tis a good day, come out to the country ; the north wind blows, the sky is all we desire, let us work and take heart ". The driver of the team of oxen treading out the corn also sings with a light heart :

" Thresh away, oxen, thresh away faster,
The straw for yourselves, and the grain for your
master ".¹

Sometimes there is a comic interlude, as in one scene in which a young urchin pokes a sleeping harvester from behind a tree. Indeed, the lighter side of things is often expressed, and with a naïveté which makes it ten times more effective ; not, however, in the subtler way of portraiture, which is generally stolid and conventional, but in the incidents and byplay of scenes. But the artist has the seeing eye, which nothing escapes, and, like Autolycus, he snaps up the unconsidered trifles, half for the fun of it, and weaves them into his generous design. He notices the cat eager for fish-bones beside the table ; the labourer emptying his pitcher to the dregs ; and the donkey which suddenly starts ahead of the herd, and with outstretched neck exhibits the horrible physical contortions of a bray. Those who have experienced such an occasion—and the opportunities are many in Egypt,—and most of all those

¹ A. H. Sayce, *Early Israel*, pp. 193-4.

who have chanced to be astride the donkey thus possessed, know all the truth of it, and all the absurdity.

The drawing is ill, the composition worse, in all these pictures. The charm is in their truth to nature, their quaintness, their endless variety, and their copious detail. Most of all, perhaps, is it in the colouring. There is little or no skill in design, unless it be in geometrical ceiling patterns, but there is charm in the disposition of the various elements of the picture, and there is also a fine sense for decorative effect. The zeal for truthfulness is tested, and survives the test, in the tomb of Ramose, a vizier of Amenophis IV., in which the king's features are reproduced in all their oddity and unattractiveness. If art could treat a king thus, both art and the king must have cared first for truth. Another, and one of the finest tombs, that of Sen-nofer, shows the same naturalism in the treatment of plant form. In tasteful arrangement, yet wholly without the intricate and ordered design with which a mediæval artist would have used it, the vine—tendril, leaf, and fruit—is made the sole decoration of a ceiling. Sen-nofer was overseer of the gardens of Ammon under Amenophis II., 1460 B.C.,—how fitting that his body should rest for ever under a canopy of the vine ! The long stems and tendrils are intertwined without any thought for uniform adjustment, yet they are so contrived as to leave

no ugly spaces on the white surface, and great purple bunches of fruit are freely distributed among the brown clustering branches. Only a people with joy in their heart could have devised such decoration for the roof of a tomb.

History is pictured on many walls, seriously for the archæologist, amusingly for humbler folk. The XVIIIth dynasty was a period of foreign conquest. All the great states of Syria-Palestine were tributary to the Pharaohs. With every expedition, prisoners were brought back from the vanquished provinces and cities, those of high degree as hostages, those of low degree as slaves. These, and the gorgeous display of Eastern finery yearly discharged on the quays of Thebes, were the acknowledgment of Egypt's power. Such scenes, in which the viziers played a part only second to that of the king, were naturally subjects desired in the decoration of their tombs. To Rekhmire, a vizier of Thothmes III., is accorded the full complement of Egypt's tributaries. They come from Syria, from the land of Punt, from Nubia and Ethiopia, bringing their several offerings of live animals and skins, chariots, vases, precious stones and embroideries. One batch appear to be Cretans, carrying as their tribute costly vessels of Mycenian design. All types are depicted with faithful solicitude for feature and dress : the Syrians have the long beards and long noses of their race, and are clothed in heavy robes to the feet ; the

people from the South have low foreheads and thick lips, and their costume is scanty. In these scenes the drawing is conventional, almost diagrammatic ; the figures are lay-figures, serving well enough to display the richness of the tribute and the glory of him who receives it. But in the case of prisoners of war the artist attempts more. He recognises the grimness, the suffering, the pathos of the subject, and succeeds in infusing its spirit, in a wide range of expression, into the picture. In the tomb of Haremhab a row of Semitic prisoners is brought before the king's treasurer, the men bound and manacled, between Egyptian soldiers, and in the rear a woman with her two young children, not bound, but led by the hand of a soldier. Hardly an emotion appropriate to such an occasion is missed. One figure walks doggedly to its doom, another with uplifted face is crying aloud in agony of soul ; the face of one is placid and indifferent, of another morose, of another quietly sad.

No corner of Egyptian life is left unnoticed ; tomb after tomb shows an entirely different scheme of decoration, and a totally new range of subjects. Scenes of the chase are many, in which the great folk of those days, like their kind in these, find the quarry thick about their feet. Every spear and every arrow gets home, and when it fails to kill, a hound is already at the throat of the victim. In one picture a wolf makes desperate efforts to withdraw

the shaft that has pierced its chest, and while it rears on hind legs and paws the arrow, a couple of dogs are hurried to the dispatch. A pleasant element in all these hunting scenes is the presence of the child, who stands by his father's side, learning the craft, or clings to his leg when the butchery is most furious. And against these scenes of recreation there are those of work. In the tomb of the royal architect the representations concern the work in which he was engaged in life. Men on scaffolding are chiselling and polishing colossal statues, others are rolling an obelisk to its destined site, others are engaged on the unskilled labour of building. In this connection one tomb is of peculiar interest. It shows men slaving at their heavy task, moulding bricks and laying them in the sun to bake, carrying great stones and lifting them into the appointed places. They are strangers in the land, and an Egyptian taskmaster stands over them. They are the "Children of Israel", who had multiplied and "waxed exceeding mighty", so that the Pharaoh had come to fear their number and their strength. They it is of whom it is written in another place, he "made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field : all their service, wherein he made them serve, was with rigour."

Many of the tombs of Shekh Abd el-Kurna have lost their decoration. With one or two exceptions

the walls were not sculptured because the rock was unsuitable ; their surfaces were plastered over, and then painted. Others have suffered, in the twenty or thirty years since they were unearthed, from the depredations of climate, tourist, and thief. In some cases a whole wall has fallen away, in some a carefully executed patch shows the work of human hand and human depravity. The injury in one instance is probably as old as the tomb. Its decoration is fresh, almost unspoiled save for the little cuts distributed, at random it seems—yet not at random—over the surface. They betray in truth a purpose of hate and venom of the blackest sort. Every cut is aimed to destroy the life of the double in the tomb, to annihilate therefore the dead man's hope of eternity. With what thoroughness villainy has done its work ! Where the representation shows the deceased engaged in his day's work, the eyes are scooped out ; where he drinks, his mouth ; where he flings the javelin, both arm and javelin are severed ; his legs severed, where he stands or walks ; and where the harper comes with music, the harp is chiselled across and the ears of the listener scraped away. His drinking vessels have holes in the bottom ; his spears and arrows are cut in two ; his tongue, when he speaks, is cut out. It was an easy and effectual mode of vengeance, and it is not a little remarkable that probably this is the single instance in which the opportunity was taken.

But many of these hillside tombs are little altered from their first state. In these the colour is so fresh, so brilliant, that it is impossible to believe it was laid on three thousand years ago. The interest of them is never-ending. The feast spread for the double is spread for the traveller to-day, and he may go—archæologist, or less—and take his fill unhindered.

VII

A DAY AT EDFU

EDFU is an illustration of the difficulties of travel in Egypt. Distances are great, and outside the three tourist centres, Cairo, Luxor, and Aswan, there is no accommodation suited to European visitors. Small inns there are, described in Baedeker as "modest quarters", but mine host is either Arab or Greek, and "modest" describes rather what is lacking than what is present and aggressive. There are no wayside hostelries, tempting as at home, no weekends. From Luxor Abydos is a hundred miles northward, Edfu sixty to the south. The railway taps the whole valley of the Nile, but trains are few, and such distances not easy to accomplish in the day; and to rail and the limit of a day must one submit, unless one be luxuriating in a dahabiye or travelling by the easy and comprehensive stages provided by Messrs Cook's steam-boats.

By rising at a period of the night which would

be euphuistically called on the English country-side "betimes", and which would actually be a little before five o'clock, it is possible to get the 6.30 train south at Luxor and to secure a whole three hours at Edfu. There are still difficulties to face, however. There is the thorny question to settle of a dragoman or no dragoman ; and when the choice is made, its inevitable consequences have to be supported. For there are drawbacks both ways, and only the day's experience can assess the gains and losses.

It is no hardship to rise early in Egypt, for there is no temptation to be late overnight. Then there is the sunrise, which is at least as wonderful, and unvaryingly wonderful, as the sunset. If Stevenson had spent a night under the palms, like the memorable night with his donkey under the pines, and come to write of it, another chapter had been added to the bible of English literature. The moving hours before dawn in England, when the mysterious summons goes forth and is answered half in sleep, may have no counterpart in the Egyptian day ; but day comes the more suddenly, the more surprisingly. Unless the season be late, the journey to Edfu includes every stage of the pageant. The early day-break is grey and unpromising as elsewhere, but for a briefer space ; then slowly the hills and desert emerge in purple, fiery reds of the sunrise flung from end to end of them, every colour growing intenser until a crescent of sun appears, and then

every colour as rapidly disappearing as the glow spreads—chasing over hill and plain, like the shadows of clouds—until in a moment, as it seems, the valley is shimmering in golden sunshine, the hills beyond are simple barren hills of desert, and the sky is the serene blue of an Eastern day.

Between dawn and the journey's end there is at least as much to see and think about as on most other journeys. Between station and station there is a constantly changing scene of river and desert, of rugged hills, rugged valleys, and here and there smiling oases of millet, wheat, barley, with clumps of date-palm and acacia to break the monotony of level fields. Where cultivation ceases it is a land of death. The desert is the negative of all one associates with landscape, and if not the charm, one must find the novelty, and learn contentment of that. There are sights, too, that repay the waiting. I once saw, quite near the railway, a flight of a dozen vultures, great of stature, bare-necked, flaming-eyed, sitting, it seemed in conclave, over some tragedy of death. Sometimes an eagle or buzzard sails overhead; sometimes (but this is generally a sign of approaching civilisation) tiny birds, gay of plumage, wax-bills, bee-catchers, perch on the telegraph wires—one wonders how they live. But on the banks of rivers and canals birds are more abundant, many of them birds that will later make an English summer—swallows, sandpipers, kingfishers. What a life ! half

spent in some sylvan reach of the Thames, half by the Nile.

At the railway stations there is no bustle. It is said that the Arabs come in from the neighbouring villages by daybreak. Their only concern is the day of the month. They come with their little bundles, sit by the rail side, and wait the coming train. No one seems to move, no one seems to be doing anything; but the train stops, and the train starts off again, and everyone appears to be satisfied. Dogs—not dogs, but ronions of the dirty native villages—collect at every station. Yet there is gentleness in their faces—one is like a bob-tailed sheep-dog, one like an Irish terrier, but still more unlike—they look hungry, and when food is thrown to them they are too eager not to snatch it, but too glad not to wag their tails.

About noon Edfu is reached. The little town and temple lie across the river on the west bank, where a rabble of donkey-boys are waiting, and where the question of dragoman or no dragoman—settled long before in Luxor—receives its first comment. Hemmed in by a dozen donkeys and a dozen Arab youths, shouting, gesticulating, one's small Arabic is expended in vain. Only when the storm wears itself out is there peace. It is one of those occasions wholly lacking the elements of tragedy and yet too uncomfortable for comedy, at least for the unwilling hero, who, at the moment, decides in favour of a dragoman.

But reward comes later, when a field is passed, a stretch of devious streets, and the temple is revealed. The custodian is anxious to air his knowledge. But when one's own Arabic is limited to a few impolite expressions, and his English to the names of three Egyptian gods, the occasion seems unprofitable. Besides, Edfu is a temple to be alone in.

The surprise of it, as compared with every other temple, is its wonderful state of perservation. No ancient building in Egypt, none in Greece or Sicily, has come down to this day so little injured. A wall collapsed a few years ago and was rebuilt, roofs here and there have been repaired, the faces of mural sculptures were disfigured by the Copts in the Christian period, and sadly mar the beauty of detail: otherwise its twenty-one centuries have passed by without doing the least violence. The effect is indescribable. Joy in the presence of glorious ruins is not often qualified with regrets, perhaps: they are accepted as ruins. But here is the hoary antiquity not ruins, but a temple; the work as it was conceived, effected, only with the benediction, not the curse of time on it. The only regret possible is that the monument is not a relic of the great days of Egypt, before the spirit of Egypt had become attenuated and something not wholly Egyptian was succeeding. The temple is Ptolemaic throughout. It was begun in 237 B.C. by Ptolemy III., about a century after Alexander the Great had taken the

country under his control, and was not completed until 57 B.C., when the period of Ptolemaic rule was fast coming to an end.

In conception and plan the temple of Edfu upholds the traditions of Pharaonic architecture. It is constructed on the same vast scale, shows no concern for time, labour, and expense, and is lavish, after the old manner, of rich ornament and decoration. More, the style and design have not altered. Except in detail, and allowing for the variations usual at all periods, it is like the temples of the Ramesside period, a thousand years before. Though Egypt had passed under foreign rule, and though Greece, with all her own traditions, her own skill and achievement in architecture, was the ruler, there are nowhere signs of influence from without, of fresh impulses or new ideals. The priestly guild of architects were allowed to go their way, in their art as unmolested as in their religion. On the walls the Ptolemy allowed himself to be represented like a Pharaoh, in the same garb, with the same un-Græcian crown, making the customary offerings to the old gods, and receiving from them the invariable rewards, delineated in hieroglyphic symbols, of life, health, stability, and happiness.

At Edfu these representations abound. Not only is the whole fabric of the temple preserved, but also the lofty stone wall which, continuing the wall of the open court, engirdles the temple so as to

leave a wide alley between. From floor to cornice, in their entire length, every surface is carved in deeply cut relief. In this the former fashion has changed. Exteriors of the XIXth dynasty were decorated with figures and scenes drawn on an enormous scale : the king bestriding his vanquished enemies would occupy three or four hundred square feet of wall ; and now that the stone is much worn, the sculpture can often be deciphered only with difficulty, and the decorative effect is lost. Here the scheme is widely different. The representations are arranged in four series, one above another, and separated into regular compartments by vertical bands of hieroglyphs ; below, at the ground level, runs a deep dado of inscriptions and designs, above, the hollow cornice. The reliefs are deeply incised, but so rounded as to bring their surfaces flush with that of the wall. It is on these the Copts wrought their despite, with such thoroughness that not a single face of the kings or gods is left unmutilated, but not so completely as to destroy the general effect, which is one of extraordinary richness.

There are other differences. Under the early Ptolemies Egypt recalled something of its former greatness and splendour, but much was irretrievably lost. Compared with the sculptures of earliest days in the tombs of Sakkarah, or with the bas-reliefs of the XIXth dynasty at Abydos, these of Edfu are clumsy and graceless. Even the rather slap-dash

work of Rameses II. was redeemed by its freedom and vigour. It was art still drawing from life and nature. The conventionalities imposed by religious belief and tradition were delivered from insipidity by originality and freshness of treatment. At Edfu the reliefs are more accurately designed, not less skilful in craft, but they are the formal, stilted, lifeless copies of former days. How could a nation revive its spiritual ardours or recapture its highest inspirations for a fifth time and after three millenniums of life ! The wonder is that it had still the energy, almost unimpaired, to pour into the old channels, and still retained the will and taste greatly to use it.

For in all else the temple of Edfu sustains the glorious traditions of Egyptian architecture. The space enclosed by its walls is four hundred and fifty feet in length and one hundred and twenty in width. The portal is flanked by gate-towers of huge proportions, about one hundred and twelve feet high, which give, in their perfect state of preservation, an appearance of great grandeur and solemnity. Classical architecture possesses nothing to correspond with them ; Gothic architecture has its west towers, and the office these perform for the church, the pylon fulfils for the Egyptian temple, not graciously or benignantly, but sombrely, austere, as though forbidding rather than inviting entry.

Once inside, all grimness, all aloofness is passed. On three sides of the great court runs a colonnade

of thirty-two columns, on the fourth is the exquisite balustrade of the hypostyle hall, in the middle of which is a high portal, and on either side three columns supporting a simple concave cornice. Here is a new spirit at work. Possibly there was no Greek influence, not even indirectly, but the beauty is more akin to that of Greece than to that of Ramesside Egypt. It is nearer to the spirit of to-day, the spirit which still draws half its life from Greece. That is why, though the cause be unguessed, that nine people out of ten would name this temple out of all others if the choice were asked. One need know nothing, think nothing, only see and feel and be satisfied. It is the same at Edfu, at Philæ, at Esneh, at Denderah, even at ruined Kom Ombo; in all Ptolemaic temples there is pleasure, at once and unsought. They do not greatly stir the soul : that power died with the Rameses a thousand years earlier. Compared with Karnak and Luxor and Abydos they leave the impress of a little race, but one still carrying in its veins some traces of the old blood, still moved by the old traditions, and with something acquired within itself added.

The addition is in gracefulness, complexity, richness, variety. The columns are smooth, for the priests could not forgo any surface on which might be displayed their cherished hieroglyphs and representations of gods, but compared with former days they are slender. For one thing they had to support

less massive architraves and cornices ; for another, the builders had learned more of the mathematics of their craft and knew better how to proportion the shaft to the superincumbent weight. But also the breed of giants has gone. These men thought and schemed in inches ; the others in yards. But with all their formalities and convention in sculpture, with all their lifeless imitations on the walls, they did achieve extraordinary success in the capitals of their columns. There they showed both inventiveness and aspiration. In the temple of the XIXth dynasty, every bud-capital, every campaniform capital, each is like every other. Of Ptolemaic capitals scarcely two are alike. One represents a circle of palm branches, tall and upright, and bending outward at the crest ; another a lotus-flower so elaborately foliated with whorls of leaf and petal that in the hands of skilful craftsmen it may be reproduced in an endless succession of varieties. With these, thirty-two in number, is the great court of the temple enriched ; and beyond the beautiful screen-wall, which divides court from temple, lie the grouped columns and capitals of the two hypostyle halls, dimly showing above the balustrade and through the portal.

Through the court hawks are shooting to and fro all day long. They come swooping down from crevices in the pylon, or dart across from one pillar to another, with constant short, shrill cry. In a temple dedicated to the hawk-headed Horus their

presence is appropriate enough. But there are sparrows in plenty, too ; and the contiguity of the two does not fit a mood at peace and desiring only peace. And how the sun beats down, as if its whole thought were centred on this place alone ! But the halls and chambers beyond keep their ancient peace and coolness. Into the first the light streams over the screen-wall and fills it, except towards the roof, where the capitals of eighteen pillars lie half in shadow. Another hall succeeds. There, are twelve columns grouped in rows of three, their capitals richly floriated and supporting carved heads of the goddess Hathor. The light enters, through holes provided in walls and ceiling, picking out pieces of sculpture here and there, but leaving most in gloom —those for the eye, these for the imagination. Beyond are the dark chambers, the pitch dark sanctuary. It is cool as night there, and peaceful and secluded as two thousand years ago, when the few priests performed their rites unmolested. Little has changed. The colour has gone, the sculpture been disfigured. One's footstep rings on the paved floor—there is not another sound : it seems to disturb the silence of twenty centuries.

There is something to be said for worship thus conditioned. How then can a man help but pray ?

In the court the hawks are still on the wing, and sparrows chirruping -not in gladness, one feels—in unseen crevices. It is indeed returning to the world,

to the burden of it, the tumult, the worry. Outside the gate all the donkeys and donkey-boys of Edfu await our favours. Choice is easy, but not the power to enforce it. The problematic question of the dragon-man receives further comment, now touched with tragedy, for there is a train to catch, and a ferry—an Egyptian ferry—to catch also. The wheel has come full-circle. But I have seen the temple of Edfu.

VIII

ASWAN

OF all fields for discovery, the most fruitful surely is Egypt. It is barely a generation ago since the country itself was discovered—by England. Then hard upon the heels of “occupation” came the discovery of the Nile, not by an English gunboat, but by an English pleasure-steamer. And still more recently, in addition to temples, tombs, royal mummies, and innumerable lesser relics of antiquity, has followed the discovery of Aswan. There is material for others than Egyptologists, it appears: if you cannot find a city, you may hope to found one.

A few years ago a winter in Egypt meant a visit to Cairo, with perhaps a flying journey up the Nile thrown in. Even now, many people who go for reasons of health remain at Helwan, a desert suburb of Cairo, which offers along with many other advantages the inducement of more reasonable charges. But to-day Aswan is *par excellence* the place of resort for all those whose search of pleasure

and health is unrestricted by other considerations ; and its two or three hotels, of the kind so comprehensively described in the phraseology of guide-books as combining Western comfort with Eastern luxury, provide all the necessary conveniences of life, both in sickness and health.

At Aswan, for a time at least, there is delight in the mere living. It is such a different world that one might have reached it with the aid of a magic carpet rather than by ordinary terrestrial means. For of all sublunary experiences there is surely none at once so insinuating and so novel as the sudden transition from West to East. The former things have indeed passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth succeeded. It is as though, after the genial and summary manner of Mrs Poyser, they had been hatched over again, and hatched differently. True, not one of the elements of landscape is missing. There are hills near and far, leading the eyes, as hills should, to irreclaimable distance ; trees, scattered and in clumps ; and at one's feet a great stretch of river, yet made more picturesque than a level sweep of water usually is by the irregularities of steep banks, and by the presence in its midst of green islands and innumerable masses of rock worn smooth by time. But, when the names are spoken, all further resemblance ends. For Aswan is carved out of the desert, and its hills, and the hollows between them preserve,

for good or ill, the characteristics of the desert. It is a landscape painted in golds and browns, in which high or low tones predominate as the sun determines, and relieved here and there by the welcome sombre greens of palms and sycamores, distributed charily, as though the desert were jealous of its dues.

Even the people that animate the scene are strange; strange their loose flowing robes and turbaned heads; strange their language of uncompromising gutturals, muttered behind half-closed lips; and stranger still their emotions, which are revealed in gestures and expressions sudden and vivid as the lightning. For where two or three are gathered together, there is noise and excitement. In such a group, while half a dozen are squatting placidly by the roadside, the seventh is on his feet, shouting, gesticulating, tearing some passion most palpably to tatters.

“The sudden blood of these men! at a word --
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.”

If the fury of the speaker is alarming, the imperturbability of the six listeners is reassuring. Indeed, though another joining and the monologue become a dialogue, there is still no occasion to fear the consequences. The experience is an everyday affair, and it never results in anything worse than words and grimaces and gestures; and peace comes as suddenly as the storm.

Thus the picture opens before one's eyes, passing from scene to scene in infinite variety, and saturated with the light of a tropical sun ; and one may look on with all the keen relish and all the ease of a stall-holder at a first-night performance. It will satisfy for many a day to come, and when the pleasures of watching are exhausted, there is the fuller enjoyment of participating. But in both rôles the first and last privilege—the first to excite surprise and delight, and the last to remain even when habit has made it too familiar for remark—is the sunshine, the ceaseless, cloudless sunshine, for ten hours of every winter's day. News from home is of leaden skies, snow thick on the ground, fog and sleet contending for dominion over the air,—all the horrors, in short, which attend on the obsequies of the dying year and the birth of the new in England. In Egypt, through the same period, it is perpetual summer.

I had almost written June, but that name on English lips, and in English hearts, must be kept only for one country on earth. Indeed, in Egypt months are only an arbitrary device contrived by man for his own convenience. There is neither January nor August, spring nor autumn. The year from beginning to end is merely a variation from heat tempered by one wind to heat distempered by another, from a season which attracts folk from the five continents to one which dismisses them, and

with which, therefore, they have no concern. And of all the delights of Egypt, that of its climate is the chief. It seems compounded of light rather than of heat. From the sudden dawn to sudden dusk there is one unfaltering procession of radiant hours, this day and every day. At the first moment of sunlight the light “grows gold, then overflows the world”, and, until the last moment of sunset, the world is possessed by it solely—the world of sky and air and earth, all three—and yields itself up as to a pagan revel.

At Aswan all things share the gladness. Even the sorry little scrubs who are the rising hope of the Nubian villages on Elephantine Island are playing games as one passes by. They are very dirty and look sadly uncared-for, but they have acquired the art of being happy—it seems on nothing, as children should. There is not a toy among them which English eyes would recognise as such; their game looks no less unintelligible; yet they are laughing together in the hot powdery sand, and when the visitor appears—the event of a livelong day—they spring to their feet, chatter and gambol like monkeys, and run before and behind piping a high-pitched call of “Baksheesh! baksheesh!” Between village and village the fellahs, their fathers, are busy in the fields, hoeing and planting. In a few yards one may see the whole life of Egypt in little—the shêkh’s house, respectable among green pas-

tures and in the shade of palm-trees ; the squalid village crowded on a bank of arid desert ; oxen or camels slowly, patiently turning the great groaning water-wheels ; donkeys under their trailing load of produce ; the mud channels circling the patches of vegetation like a system of arteries, to disperse their no less precious fluid ; men and women, working, working from sunrise to sundown : this is Egypt, its life within, silent and unobtrusive ; as the Pharaohs knew it, so it is to-day. To complete the picture, there in a plot of growing millet a labourer falls on his knees. It is mid-day, the Mohammedan hour of prayer ; and he leaves work, forgets the world and the care, to pray.

In the town itself, stretching in a white line along the Nile, the scene is still Eastern, but with a difference. The other is the true Egypt, the Egypt of the soil ; this the Egypt of commerce, of competition and bartering, and a little spoiled in the practice by the presence of rich and idle visitors from the West ; that, of men asleep, but toiling ceaselessly in their sleep ; this, of men awake and alert, decked in fine raiment, persistent, clamorous. They stand by their bazaars inviting purchase. They resort to every device known to European shopkeepers, and many unknown. It is all so lurid, so fascinating, that one is as willing to be swindled as the gambler is willing to chance his *louis d'or* at Monte Carlo. The cases on the floor groan with

“antiques”, scarabs mostly fresh from the skilled hands of modern Luxor, or precious stones from the Soudan, or stones not precious from elsewhere, inextricably mingled. The walls are hung with the woven goods of the East, and a feast to the eye ; carpets, rugs, embroideries, silks, laces, cottons. These, at any rate, there is no doubt about. But beware the “old” weapons tastefully arranged among the draperies. Some of them date from the Mohammedan feuds of the Middle Ages, some more humbly stained with the blood of Mahdi insurrections. But if one have the curiosity to pry round the outer purlieus of the town, away behind the native quarters, one may chance upon the smithy and a heap of scrap iron which is the inexhaustible source of both.

Between town and river, where the river leaves a wide stretch of bank, lies the grain market, the last scene of the commercial life of Aswan. Here is an air of greater seriousness, but it is silent. The men of the country are selling, buying among themselves. The foreign visitor merely looks on, and with his presence they are unconcerned. Grain and seeds, sugar-cane, the varied produce of the fertile soil of Egypt, lie in mounded heaps on the ground. The rough-hewn feluccas with the great bowed yards which have brought them from north and south are anchored by the river-side in picturesque line, and beyond are the towering sand-hills of the western

desert. Each in his own area, partitioned off by dried palm-branches, the merchants go about their business, calm and dignified. How the flowing blue or black robe becomes them, they it! They sell or fail to sell with the same serenity of mien, the same fine aloofness from the sordid concerns in which fate has placed them. Here the native is at home ; in the bazaar he is hired out for a European holiday.

And when the pleasures of looking on, of merely being, are done, there is an endless joy of doing. For another gain of the climate of Egypt is that through the long tourist season it is rarely too hot to interfere with active occupation. Near at hand are the attractions, for such as are concerned, common to all fashionable hotels, and which, therefore, it is unnecessary to name. The difficulty is rather to escape them, or to take the dosage according to inclination, not to prescription. But the desert is wide, and free as the wind that sweeps it. When one grows tired of one's fellows, tired of watching the Nile creeping among the granite crags of the cataract, and the play of light on water and rock, there is always solitude there, and variety, and exhilaration. "In the desert", says an Eastern proverb, "no man meets a friend"; better still, he may even hope to avoid an acquaintance. But the solitude he must expect is not complete, for the companionship of donkey and donkey-boy is almost

inevitable. It is one, perhaps the chief, drawback of Egypt that one must go abroad thus attended. There are few and short roads, and those only in the vicinity of towns; over the desert are no beaten tracks; and it is weary work labouring afoot through the loose, hot sand. If only the donkey alone would suffice! for such companionship as his would fit well with the silent spirit of the desert. But, alas, there is nothing for it but to take both, so indissoluble are boy and donkey, not by the bonds of mutual love, but for reasons more occult. The simple truth is that either is useless without the other: the boy alone cannot carry the desired burden, the donkey alone will not.

But, as in most things, there are compensations. Who shall name the thrilling, breathless fun of scampering across the level desert on a sturdy, nimble beast, with the boy's wild whoops sounding from the distance to speed it; climbing from ledge to ledge of hills that look impossible, and descending precipitously on the other side, till smooth ground is again reached, and the same wild whoop startles him into further headlong flight! And perhaps one's donkey-boy may be uncommunicative, or his vocabulary limited, and the desire to enlarge it easily appeased, and then the only drawback to the arrangement has disappeared. The desert is around, its eternities of solitude and silence, and the very pre-

sence of mute companions may add to its impressiveness.

At the height of day the delights of the desert are physical. The exercise quickens the pulse; the clear keen air uplifts, like champagne. There are wonderful distances to look across, covered in every direction with crests and ridges of hills; but their height is too uniform, their contour too regular—much as though the billows of a tempestuous sea had been fixed for ever in stone—to satisfy the eye. The colour is even less pleasing, and more monotonous, for the dazzling sunshine produces an equality of browns and golds in which the subtler gradations of tone are wholly lost. In the fierce light the desert is reduced to its elements, sand and rubble, which are scattered over rock and valley alike, filling all inequalities of surface with the same featureless regularity, like the refuse of a spent volcano, and which only cease to be ugly when distance or the dusk of evening lend their enchantment. But they provide surface good enough for the willing donkey, and—to exhaust in a single line the pleasure of the occasion,—

“Sing, riding’s a joy. Nor me, I ride”.

But at evening, when the light is waning and the sun sheds its last slanting beams across the desert, the scene of the day’s luridness and desolation is changed in a moment, as at the moving of a wand.

There can be no transformation in nature so divinely beautiful, so moving, or half so sudden, yet gentle, as this of a desert sunset.

“The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration”,

and of nowhere and of nothing else may the words more fittingly be spoken. Yet that is only half. There is the spirit of worship; there is added a gorgeous ritual. The gaunt, bare shapes of hollow and hill are clothed in a moment with a glory beyond description, beyond belief. This is the hour to choose for the desert, and the hour to be alone there. The land of death, by some strange alchemy, has been transmuted into a land of gold—liquid, fiery gold, overflowing every mound and every depression—gold, and a dozen hues that seem like iridescent lights to play upon the gold’s surface. Then, when the last burning crescent of sun has disappeared, the colours slowly deepen into gloom, not the grey gloom of a Western world, but purple, deep, intense, lustrous, like the bloom on a grape—the colour of kings, and of the twilight desert.

Of other gentle pursuits at Aswan, much the most pleasant is the boating. There are desert and donkeys at Helwan, and a far richer and more varied supply of both at Luxor; but nowhere else is there such a fascinating stretch of river, or such alluring facilities for using it, as the neighbourhood

of the First Cataract ; nor, when “ the wind sits in the shoulder of your sail ”, can there be many more dreamy joys than taking felucca and sailing with sun and breeze where and as the mood directs. The cataract deserves its name only in the season of spate, when the Nile plunges headlong down three miles of sloping bed, backed by the volume and force of equatorial rains. In the winter months it is little more than a placid sheet of water, slowly moving northward, for the great dam three or four miles higher up disengages a volume sufficient to maintain a constant flow.

Sun and breeze ! If the yachtsman ask aught else it would be the chance to prove his skill. Here he is pretty sure of all three, and an exquisitely varied and picturesque scene to boot. No water in the world do wind and sun visit so unfailingly; nowhere are they so subtly blended to win delight; and, what with the watchfulness necessary to detect the trivial signs of submerged sand-banks, and the craft necessary to keep the wind in narrow channels and safely to clear innumerable corners of rock,—the call on prowess, and the enjoyment in the exercise of it, are inexhaustible.

Of river scenery, this is the best Egypt has to give. Below Aswan it has the characteristics common to the Upper Nile, their charm and their monotony—an interminable succession of hills and defiles by which the desert encroaches to the water’s edge,

with here and there a fringe of palm-trees, and here and there, in suitable depressions, a reclaimed patch of vegetation, a white-walled cottage or two, and a group of such trees as afford the sole shade of the desert—lebbek, tamarisk, or sycamore. But above Aswan the scenery suddenly becomes wilder and more varied. The west bank, swept with rich golden sand, slopes gently upward to a height of two or three hundred feet; the right is a rugged, almost sheer wall of granite, sometimes presenting a level front, sometimes riven and moulded as though composed of layer upon layer of great boulders. In between, throughout the three miles to the artificial wall of the reservoir, the river is scattered over with islands of every shape and size, from the large green inhabited island of Elephantiné, regular in contour and surface, and the still larger but barren precipitous Sehel, its rocks scored with the names and records of Pharaohs, to the irregular masses of polished dusky granite, scarce deserving the name of island, which give such a weird picturesqueness to this part of the river. It is these islands which afford, besides charm and variety to the scene, so much interest to sailing. Sometimes they form narrow channels, through which the water, even at low river, swirls with appreciable force and swiftness, and sometimes they make with the shore what appears to be a lake without outlet, until nearer approach reveals the passage into a further reach;

and always there is the delight of discovering one's way among them with a fresh breeze in the sail and sunshine everywhere.

On the river, too, as on the desert, falls the glory of an Eastern sunset—even more glorious, perhaps, because of the reflections in the water and the contrasting spectral gloom of its island-rocks. In the desert the whole world, in such an hour, is dominated by colour and silence; here, nearer the haunts of men, many sounds are borne on the air, but they seem neither harsh nor unwelcome, but rather to stir deeper emotions. Even the merry rhythmic song of Nubian boys returning with their boats from Shellal comes over the distant water more like the echoes of a spirit world. And when the single substantial voice—the muezzin's from the turret—at last rings out through the quiet air, it still seems, like theirs, only a sound born of the night; but the world is listening now, and the message is for kings and peasants: “God is great—There is no God but God—Come to prayer, come to worship—God is great—There is no God but God”.

Then silence, and the sudden dark.

IX

ASWAN (*continued*)

AN ANCIENT HERITAGE

AT Aswan one may live as innocent of Egyptology as at Timbuctoo. Of course most visitors go to Philæ—but Philæ need mean no more than a donkey-ride, lunch, and the climbing of a pylon. But, although Aswan is immeasurably less rich in historic remains than Luxor and Cairo, it might be accounted princely rich except by comparison. For, besides Philæ, whose treasure some might suppose plentiful enough to satisfy a whole season's quest, there is at least sufficient to counteract the obsessions of hotel life. Where folk walk aimlessly and unoccupied, there are the footprints of Pharaohs at their very feet. But the divinity that doth hedge a king survives, in the minds of many, no longer than his own mortal remains. Besides, people who have already sailed the length of the Nile, visited Beni Hasan, Abydos, Karnak, Thebes, been carried to temples and tombs willy-nilly every day and all

day for three consecutive weeks, have had a surfeit of the past, be it ever so kingly. They have left the "North Land", the land of the papyrus, and in the lotus-land of the south they dream and sleep and play and are content.

And so it comes about that the tourist who has a liking for such things may exercise it, at the hour that suits him best, without the smallest fear of intruding on the researches of others. The remains of greatest interest may be made the objects of the day's excursion, by donkey or by boat. Others, again, lie by the way—mere footprints—and to the wayfarer not less surprising than those seen by the shipwrecked Friday. A little way in the desert, for instance, are the quarries from which in most ancient days the Egyptians fetched the granite for their obelisks and statues. The marks in the rock still show their method of working. Here a huge block is completely severed, there one just started on. Near by, prone in the sand, lies a roughly finished colossus, ready to be transported to its destination, where the sculptor will give it final shape. All are there, as though the workmen had but laid down their tools until the morrow.

Elsewhere, in a hundred places, likely and unlikely, are rocks and boulders scored with the names of Pharaohs, or with their figures boldly carved in outline. For here, at this very spot, was instituted the oldest and most universal order in

the world—the order of trippers. The distinction which Bacon, in the delightfulest of essays, claims for Adam as a gardener, these stones of the First Cataract avouch in their downright dogged prose for the Pharaoh Usertesen as a tripper. Whether the honour of founding the order belongs to him or not, from the day, more than forty centuries ago, on which that great monarch visited Aswan—the outposts of his empire—and scored his name on the island rocks, the order received royal sanction as its mark of membership. For two thousand years new members were enrolled—Pharaohs of Egypt, Greek Ptolemies, Roman Emperors—and their names added to the granite scroll. What other book of autographs in the world can show the like! With such names to read by the way, such memories to conjure up, the desert is no longer barren, its paths no longer desolate.

Early in the morning, while the air still retains the delicious cool and freshness which seem to come of night dews, it is well to take boat and one's lunch across the river to the west bank, to spend a day among the rock-tombs. The tombs of Beni Hasan, more famous still, must be visited within the hours prescribed by a Nile steamer, with its full complement of passengers and a dragoman—flushed with Egyptology and three languages—in attendance. These of Aswan, perched half way up a sand-driven hill, one may loiter among hour after hour without

fear of disturbance. The caretaker may at first show a desire to vent his small English on you, but the effort generally dies out in a few sporadic gutturals. Or, if he be more persistent, and his presence ceases to amuse, there is an easy remedy at hand. It is only necessary to spell out a line of hieroglyphs on the walls—a king's name for choice, as being one most likely to come within your knowledge and his recognition—and the result is instantaneous and invariable. He looks half astonishment, half awe, and slowly retires. Either you are the Inspector-General of Antiquities (or of that ilk), or the devil!

Left alone, there is a whole day ahead of the pleasures of knowledge, of surprises, and of dreams. The situation itself is wonderful. Below is the gleaming belt of river winding among its islands; beyond it, the white town of Aswan; and beyond that again an enveloping eternity of desert. The spaciousness tempts the imagination; the dry tonic air of the hillside fires it. And perhaps there is no spot in Egypt where fancy finds material more simple or more intimate. There is an absence of that splendour of size and decoration which so often, in Egyptian tombs, calls forth astonishment, and so rarely impresses solemnity. These humbler but yet imposing tombs at Aswan have that about them which impels feelings appropriate to their ancient purpose. They are sepulchres of the dead, not show-places of the living.

The approach from the river to the terrace along which the tombs lie is the same rude stairway used ages back to convey the mummies of the departed to their last resting-place. Guide-books describe it as one of the most interesting antiquities in Egypt : it is certainly one of the most impressive. The great steps, more suited to giants than ordinary mortals, are cut in two parallel flights, with a raised level slide between, on which was dragged the heavy burden of muimmy and sarcophagus. Thus, simply contrived and ruggedly shaped, the stairway runs straight up the hill, bounded on either side by a deep wall and drifts of golden sand. What, save age, can be so impressive about it ? Nothing perhaps so much as age itself, when age, like that of Pyramid and Sphinx, hoary, irreclaimable, seems more eternity than years, more God's time than man's. Yet there is something else—the wonder of destination—the mystery which gives romance to the distant road winding over the brow of the hill, which leads men somewhere—but whither ?—to what valley beyond, what fresh scenes, new life, new purposes ? At the foot of the stairway is the same mystery, the same questioning. It, too, leads somewhere—where, in all this lonely waste ? Feet have trodden it for centuries—the well-worn footprints are on every step. And it still preserves a way, still invites the wayfarer. Grim, enduring, inevitable, it mounts straight to some destination,

hidden and solitary. One asks, what? But no answer is given save to those who go and seek; and none seems necessary. All that it seems, and is, befits a road to the abodes of death.

The whole hillside is honeycombed with tombs, but only a few have been excavated, and of these still fewer are well preserved. In all they cover thirty-five centuries of Egyptian history, and comprise every stage of the national funerary art from its opulence, seriousness, and beauty to its perfunctoriness, poverty, and decay. The earliest and best of them date from a time we may glibly denote by numbers, but which it is impossible to realise. The name of the father of the Hebrew race recalls a past almost fabulous in its antiquity, yet many of the tombs go back to the time when Abraham and his followers visited Egypt, and one of them is probably six or seven centuries older still. It is well to take account of their prodigious age, not because it is necessary to find extenuation for archaisms and crudity of workmanship, but rather fittingly to appraise it, and to provide the emotional medium, as it were, through which all ancient art must be seen if the fullest pleasure is to be obtained. Nor need one be an Egyptologist, or able to spell out a single hieroglyphic, to feel the wonder and delight. The chief wonder is still that mankind, five thousand years ago, should have been able to hew such splendid sepulchres in the solid rock, and

at the bidding of its faith did so hew them ; the chief delight, the work achieved—its scope, lavishness, skill, and ingenuity.

It was not enough merely to carve out a chamber, and dress and decorate its walls and ceiling. The tomb was the “Abode of the Dead”, and was designed, not as the repository of a mummy—the mummy was buried deep in a shaft of the rock to preserve it against injury and theft—but as a stately pleasure-house for the spirit or “double” of the dead man, which, released at death, must henceforth dwell there. The poor had to be content with the best their poverty could provide—no more perhaps than a mere hole in the sand. But the prince and official, they who had enjoyed the pleasures and luxuries of this life, aimed to secure the same privileges for the “double” which would represent their own personalities, feel their wants, delight in their occupations and pastimes after they were gone.

With such a serious purpose in view, it was natural enough that every man of position and means should seek to provide a worthy sepulchre. The task was begun and carried out under the supervision of the future occupant. As the Mohammedan to-day is reminded of the seriousness of life and the certainty of death by the turban which circles his head seven times for daily wear, and will later suffice for his winding-sheet, so did the grim duty of the old Egyptian impress in the

heyday of life the solemn thought of death and eternity.

In what manner the work was done these tombs on the lonely hillside show. Generally there is no exterior adornment; the rock-front is levelled and dressed, and a simple but spacious doorway gives entrance to the interior. One, however, the most splendid of them, dating from the XIIth dynasty (*circa* 2200 B.C.), has a large courtyard in front of it, walled round, and entered by a richly carved limestone doorway, while at the rear of the court there still remain six of the eight rectangular pillars which formerly made a colonnade along its entire length. Such lavish addition to the exterior, so difficult to provide on the slope of a hill, is another proof of the tremendous seriousness which animated the work of preparing a tomb.

The interiors vary with all the differences depending on the fashion and skill of the times and the individual taste, means, and requirements of the owner. One is a splendid hall of massive columns, eighteen of them grouped in three rows—all hewn out of the living rock,—among which the sunshine from the wide portal makes play of dancing patches of light and depths of mysterious gloom. Another and more usual arrangement is of room after room and corridor beyond corridor passing straight on into the rock for a hundred feet or more, each chamber being enriched with graceful six-

sided columns, and each corridor recessed with niches containing mummiform statues. In some, again, there is little decoration on the walls, perhaps an artificial door, or stela, surrounded by a heavy circular moulding and surmounted by a simple concave cornice, and here and there a clump of hieroglyphs, or a rude sculpture of a pastoral or hunting scene taken from the daily life of the valley. In others, such scenes are on a bigger scale and more carefully executed in sunk relief. They depict the deceased man spearing fish from his boat in the reeds, or seated peacefully before a table of offerings, or going forth to the chase, followed by his bow-bearer and dog ; cattle, led and driven, in various postures of docility, wilfulness, and rage ; the storage of wheat, wine in hospitable jars, and grateful burdens of papyrus and lotus flowers.

They tell their tale simply as the child's, and there is the same pleasure, the same insinuating charm in spelling out the one as in piecing together the other. But the sculpture is nowhere in sufficient quantity to give richness to the walls. Save beautiful bits of vivid colour here and there, little is left to disturb the almost severe simplicity of style and decoration, which indeed seems most fitting in structures so venerable and devised for the solemn purpose of sepulture. Where they do occur, however, --befitting or not--they bring a shock of pleasure

such as an illuminated capital brings, coming after page upon page of grave black-letter type. The inmost recess at the depths of one of the longest tombs affords such a burst of colour. It is a tiny little shrine, towards which walls, floor, and ceiling seem to converge as though to draw attention to the tomb's one treasure. Here at one time stood an image of the dead man. Now the space is empty, but its walls are chiselled with the most delicately executed figures and hieroglyphics, like miniatures hanging in a cabinet. The colour is still fresh upon them as though it had been done but yesterday—a yesterday that is four thousand years ago ; and in the one ray of sunshine that reaches the tomb from the outer world they glow and sparkle in the midst of surrounding gloom.

A morning in the tombs brings its last reward. Within is the semi-darkness which is the same in every clime ; without is the radiant searching light which is Egypt's alone. The blue sky overhead, the golden world beneath, both seem limitless, and the sunshine possesses every corner of them. A green landscape absorbs the light ; Alpine snows reflect it like a blank mirror ; the desert holds it like the sparkling liquid in a cup. An hour's gloom were worth while if only for the gain of a sensation so intense, so sudden.

There is, hidden away in the desert, a relic of antiquity in many ways more interesting even than

the rock-tombs. It is removed from them by an immensity of time which may be counted by millenniums, and by differences of character and spirit still more vast, still more impressive. For the gifts of Egypt are as various as they are many and wonderful. It is a land, so to speak, of perpetual "Arabian Nights", in which the treasures of history are exhibited for these of romance, and exhibited in such diversity, and covering such vast epochs of time as gives them all the wonder and the colour of romance. Egypt possesses a talisman by which it can carry mind and eye at a leap over the gulfs of centuries, show the cradle and the very swaddling-clothes of the human race, and again, in the twinkling of an eye, the novelties of our own day ; and reveal side by side the records of races, civilisations, religions, themselves far asunder as the poles.

Many visitors to Egypt, even intent on knowledge, miss this, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of its genius. In their pursuit of the monuments of Egyptology they forget that Egypt has a long, almost unbroken, mediæval history ; that after its ancient kingdom and ancient faith had passed away it embraced, at the bidding of its Roman conquerors, the new religion of Christianity ; and later still, with the passing of the Roman Empire, came under the heel of Islam,—that Egypt was the scene of these world-epochs, and preserves

to-day innumerable examples of the buildings, sculpture, and art which they severally produced.

Such an one—if the lengthy digression may be pardoned—is the monastery of S. Simeon, situated on the west bank of the Nile above Aswan. It is well to choose afternoon for the visit, so that it may be prolonged till sunset, when the lights and shades of evening may be seen to singular advantage from the eminence on which the ruins stand. The boat is run into shore just where the hill of tombs suddenly dips downward to form a depression between itself and the succeeding range. The little valley thus opening to the river, after winding inward among rounded sand-hills, and always gently ascending, ends at last in a narrow *cul-de-sac*, surrounded by a bank yellow and smooth with sand-drift some thirty or forty feet high. Not till the bank is climbed does the monastery, standing a little way back, come into full view.

Except that the hills and hollows are on so small a scale, the situation is like that of many a mediæval castle in the mountain fastnesses of Scotland or Wales. It suggests a choice providing safety and a ready means of defence, rather than one devised solely for its beauty of prospect, though this, of a desert kind, is amply afforded. The great pile of sombre ruins, as they first appear, are profoundly impressive, not so much for any beauty of their

own—for only in a restricted sense can they deserve the title—not indeed from any one element in the barren, desolate scene, but from all. The commanding position, the gloom of frowning walls contrasted with the dazzling sand around them, the picturesque arrangement of buildings—a central core, like a castle keep, rising perpendicularly from the level rock to a height unmatched by anything around it, a massive outer wall, turreted and embrasured, deployed along a wide dip of undulating ground—these, and the novelty, the unexpectedness, the solemnity,—all contribute something to an imposing spectacle. It is, indeed, the style and characteristics of the architecture which provide the chief wonder. Egypt has made us familiar with ruins far out and solitary in the desert, but with nothing like this. The first and last impression is of something alien to the place, something of mighty purpose, but born out of due time, and doomed never to fulfil it.

Such was, in fact, the fate of this monastery ruin—the largest, it is said, of all those built by Christian Egypt. Its date is uncertain, but it was probably abandoned as early as the thirteenth century. As Philæ was the last stronghold of the old Egyptian faith up to the sixth century of our era, and one hundred years or more after the edicts of Theodosius had imposed Christianity on the rest of Egypt, so was the neighbouring

monastery of S. Simeon the final rallying-place, seven centuries later, of Christianity, when already Islamic rule and religion had driven it forth elsewhere. Both were far from the centres of population, both far from the world of men and arms—too far to push a battalion of soldiers for the purpose of punishing a band of harmless devotees; and so both, the temple of Philæ and the monastery of S. Simeon in turn, were given the distinction of sheltering the last adherents of their respective beliefs.¹ The monastery served its brief day, and perished as religious houses were wont to perish in the Middle Ages.

The inside repays many a visit, less perhaps for what is to be seen than for what is to be spelled out, guessed at, imagined; less for what it is in the present than for what it is possible to reconstruct out of the past. The ruins are situated at two different levels. The great eastern girdle-wall, built largely of stone, the chapel, and many out-buildings—some of them mere piles of debris—occupy a stretch of level ground; the main buildings stand well back on a plateau of rock about twenty feet above the former, and consist of two more or less complete storeys and a third indicated by frag-

¹ This must not be taken to mean that Christianity was entirely banished from Egypt. To this day there is a considerable population of native Christians, so-called Copts. But after the introduction of Mohammedanism they became a homeless, flying, persecuted remnant.

ments of wall and part of a doorway. A shrub here or there, a creeper on the naked walls, a flower in a crevice—if nature had done ever so little, the ruins had been made beautiful. But, bare and abandoned as all the splendid ruins of Egypt look, these, close at hand, have an appearance amounting almost to ugliness, derived from the material of which they are constructed. For stone was used only in the girdle-wall and the first floor; the rest is built entirely of sun-dried mud bricks—such as provided both the palaces of kings and the huts of peasants in early days, and serve most needs of Egyptian domestic architecture to-day. As a consequence the walls have the uniform colourlessness of earth—the dulness, the dirtiness,—and where they are fallen the heaps of debris are nothing but heaps of neglected dust and ashes.

But, after a little pottering about, after a few discoveries and surprises, awakened interest soon dispels any feeling of disappointment. There is the delight that ever attaches to ruins, of working out the plan, of giving to each room its appropriate designation—this the refectory, this a chapel, this a dormitory,—of conning over, speculating on, contrasting special features of architecture, and of coming unawares upon the little simple touches which give a living human interest to all.

Enough remains to reconstruct the original plan and disposal of the rooms, which must have served

the simple cloistral needs of at least fifty monks. The wide, imposing corridors, dividing each storey into halves, still retain much of their vaulted ceilings, the fine proportions of the arch proving with what skill the old builders could manipulate their little mud bricks. Though, indeed, the practice of vaulting was no new one to Egyptian architects, as the well-preserved examples in the store-houses of the Ramesseum at Thebes prove. The sleeping-rooms, opening from the main corridor, each with its four diminutive stone beds ranged alongside the walls, and its tiny lancet chinks for light and air, seem to have imposed perpetual penance—if gloom and airlessness, cramp and cold were such. A little further along on the blank wall of the corridor is a fresco, crudely drawn and coloured, of the Christ enthroned, and an angel and six other indistinguishable figures standing by. It occupies a place of honour, where it could be most often and best seen—the sole art-thing those simple folk possessed, perhaps, except in the chapel, for there, in addition to many most interesting architectural features, the choir still retains evidences of profuse decoration. In the half-dome above it is the figure of Christ in the centre, and on either side an angel—simple efforts enough, but conceived in the right spirit, and, for such an age and place, precious. With so much decoration in the one situation, one wonders with what richness the whole

chapel appeared when in the heydey of its prime. Sufficient remains to awaken many dreams, to excite many questions. But to most questions the heaps of desiccated soil—which then had form and beauty, and spoke thereby—are now for ever dumb.

In addition to rock-tombs, and the monastery of S. Simeon, there are still many other antiquities of interest at Aswan. In the town itself are the remains of a Ptolemaic temple, and the island of Elephantiné—once the birthplace of princes, and in all times a centre of military and religious life—is literally strewn with the carved and lettered stones of ancient temples, by which one may read, even in the ruined fragments, the slow decay of national art and life from the great age of Rameses to the last phase of all when Egypt had lost both under the rule of Imperial Rome. But their records lie for the most part below the surface of the ground—either they are foundations exposed by excavation, or loose stones half buried by the ever-drifting sand. And folk, glutted by the largess of an Egyptian feast, can hardly be expected to search for crumbs in ugly, uninviting holes of the desert.

X

THE ROAD TO PHILÆ

FOR the Faithful to journey once in a lifetime to Mecca is an obligation. To go again is to go voluntarily and, with each succeeding visit, to add in honour and holiness. Even to-day the pilgrimage has its difficulties and risks. Year by year men go in their thousands to the Sacred City, some happily over seas, some with sore travail through the desert wastes their fathers trod long ago. And year by year many are they who never return. They fall from the ranks and die, their very names unknown, their life and death alike unrecorded. May Allah reward !

Away in the Middle Ages lived Shêkh Seyyid el-Bedawi, a native of Egypt and a good Muslim. He went to Mecca once, he went again ; and, whether for the mere love of travel or from devotion to his faith, he continued to go each year, until in a ripe old age and full of holiness he died. He was canonised saint and, fittingly enough, he became the patron saint of travellers. They buried him at Aswan just where the desert makes a level

sweep between high ledges of rock—the road to Philæ, and past Philæ through the trackless, desolate stretches of Arabian desert to Abu Hammed and the far south. The place is marked by a little mosque or kubba which stands back from the road with one small lebbek tree—a starveling of the desert—to guard it.

In those days, and on such a road, there was need to propitiate the saint. The road was infested by gangs of robbers from the wandering desert tribes, and those who travelled along it in possession of money or merchandise knew its chances and its terrors, and knew the toll it would surely exact unless heaven and the saint lent aid. So men turned aside to the little sanctuary and prayed and gave alms ; and you may to-day see the well-worn hole between window-sill and iron grating through which generations of travellers have pushed their coins. The dangers have gone, but they still stop to pray, and—sometimes—to give ; and of them all perhaps not one could name a reason for his offering save that so his fathers did before him, and so likewise is it well that he should do.

One day I witnessed a strange instance of the practice, I should suppose an unusual one, for on many previous occasions I had noticed wayfarers, sometimes in charge of laden camels, stop before the shrine and make their prayer with bowed heads and in silence, so unobtrusively that a passer-by

might easily have failed to notice them. But in this instance another and very different method was adopted, whether according to a recognised ritual or whether only an expression of individual eccentricity, I cannot say. The desert road happened to be almost entirely deserted, and as I drew near to the Kubba-el-Bedawi the only person in sight was an Arab, coming at a sharp trot from the opposite direction. Having reached the mosque, he wheeled his donkey sharp round so as to face it. At first there was no sound, and scarcely a movement ; he appeared to be devoutly worshipping in a way at all times most impressive and not least so in a solitary figure on the open desert. But suddenly a dramatic, perhaps rather a melodramatic, change came over the scene. The minute's silence was only preparatory to a paroxysm of effort. Throwing his head as far back as it could possibly be made to go, the fellow emitted the most horrible raucous yell, which, when one's startled senses became capable of determining the nature of it, sounded like a gargling process in some Gargantuan throat. It was long sustained, as long as breath lasted, the turgid complexion and the swollen contorted muscles of face and neck showing how thoroughly the feat was performed. Then the sound ceased, the head was bent forward, the muscles relaxed, and the desert resumed its ancient quiet. But it was only for a moment, only

so long, it appeared, as allowed the devotee to regain full breath ; when again the distortions and the dreadful noise were repeated. Four times was the strange rite performed with the same unfaltering, scrupulous zeal, before the Arab ended, shook himself as though getting free of an evil possession, and quietly—quietly as only Arabs can—resumed his journey.

On either side the road are other Mohammedan tombs than that of the Shêkh el-Bedawi. They are grouped picturesquely among the little hummocks of sand and rock which rise in gentle undulations over the generally level surface of desert. Those nearest the road consist of no more than one tiny room, fit for the worship of the chance wayfarer, and perhaps an adjoining courtyard of like dimensions, which gives an air of dignity and completeness to the structure, while a few, further away, and on still higher ground, are larger and of more imposing proportions. In every case their architectural construction is of the simplest possible—four containing walls, broken by a doorway and windows, and surmounted by a dome. The only material used in the building was the sun-baked mud brick, such as provides the native dwellings of Egypt to-day. A little whitening to disguise the drab walls, a line of colour, blue or terra-cotta, for a frieze, and initiative, skill, and taste have done the rest, have given character and diversity of design

and a wealth of picturesque detail to each tomb. The mediæval Mohammedan builder loved his dome even more, I think, than the Gothic builder his tower. He worked in curves, felt the beauty of them, knew how inexhaustible were the possibilities of new forms and new combinations. Of these in the Arab cemetery no two domes are alike, or, indeed, in the least degree similar ; and they give pleasure to a later day, not because of their beauty only, but because they show, as clearly as the expression of a living face, the pride and joy with which the work was done.

All the tombs were built in the Middle Ages to mark the burial-places of Mohammedans who had fallen in the long bloody strife between Cross and Crescent, and whose deaths in such a service gave them the right to special honour in burial and to the regard of after generations. The names of the underlying dead are entirely forgotten, or, if remembered, convey little or nothing to their co-religionists of the present day ; but the cenotaphs remain, some of those better preserved still providing the straggling worshipper with a shrine, and all, ruined or not, claiming respect as venerable memorials of bygone days.

It is pleasantest to wander among them at evening, the hour when the delicious cool and quiet of the desert are most seductive. They stand only a few minutes away from the town and the hotels, but

far enough at that hour to be out of the sound of both. Even so short a distance in Egypt one never walks, for the sand is loose and the way rough, and donkey and donkey-boy are available at any moment : whenever one appears in public, at whatever hour, there by one's side are the twain waiting, the boy half-cajolingly and all-vehemently proffering the best donkey in Egypt, perhaps by the insinuating name of "Philæ" or (in an animal of locomotion) the more redoubtable one of "Automobile," and the "best donkey in Egypt" standing by in mute acquiescence. Resistance is not easily possible, the less so that in Egypt, according to some universal law, the traveller soon comes to resist nothing.

It is best to stay on

"While the quiet coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles ",

and to watch the old mud sepulchres and domes share in the glory of the sunset, and melt like shadows into the purple glow of desert and sky.

The road to Philæ, at the entrance to which the tombs stand, is no road indeed, but just a wide tract of level sand between the granite hills of the First Cataract, gathering folk together, as the Nile its waters, it seems from nowhere, and hurrying them nowhither ; bringing grain from the Soudan, and carrying merchandise to the thousand villages of the desert. What a motley throng that passes

along, varied in race, in clothes, in equipment, in demeanour—varied in all but the time and the place and the ability to take life at a walk. All save the donkey. He too would keep the customary pace, but being a donkey and best ridden by youth whose love of torment still outweighs the indolence of race and blood, he breaks sometimes into a shameless trot, and propriety and the loose sands of the road are for a moment disturbed.

The stream flows by from daybreak to sunset, sometimes reduced to a mere trickle, sometimes in turbulent flood—Bedouins, Arabs, Nubians, Bishareen ; village shêkhs astride donkeys, and wearing the spacious robe, tarbush, and pointed red shoes which mark them out for men of importance in their day ; fellahin on foot, revealing always the habit and expression of the toiler in the fields, revealing sometimes, too, in face and feature, an indubitable kinship with the ancient Pharaohs ; and here and there a Copt who still clings to the black turban which is the badge of misery and persecution his forefathers suffered when, in the Middle Ages, Mohammedanism won Egypt to its faith.

Just to watch the stream of life flowing impassively along, to speculate on the units composing it—what manner of man is this or that, whence he comes, whither he goes, and how far the problems of life touch him, or trouble—is one of the unfail-

ing pleasures of the desert road. It is like being on a London 'bus, watching, with the same interest, the same unconscious questioning, the crowd moving below. But here there is difference no less great than the surroundings. One questions, but without answer, without satisfaction. The Occidental feels the barrier of race insuperable ; he possesses no talisman by which to read the faces of passers-by. But sometimes there comes a sudden enlightenment, and even a dusky mask and a strange language cannot disguise the things beneath. Perhaps a rider comes along with a song and a laugh, and one knows that there, at any rate, is a merry heart, though the laugh has not quite an English ring in it, and the song be barely recognisable as song. Or a group of silent women have gone by apart from the general stream, like weathered crafts hugging the shore, worn down with their burdens and wearily pushing through the hot sand to gain some squalid home along the banks of the cataract, and even without a tear or the sound of a sigh one has recognised the silent misery. But between these extremes there seems little else to judge with certainty. The occupation is merely the idle one of curiosity, to look and conjecture, and to be content without answer. There is no help to be got from salutations. I have wandered along the road a hundred times and not witnessed more than half a dozen greetings. The folk pass and repass ;

whence coming, whithersoever going—strangers. This loneliness of the people is striking enough everywhere outside the towns ; here, where they meet so freely, and pass, most striking of all. It is the tragedy of the desert acted in dumb charade.

But the road to Philæ is the scene of half the pleasure and jollity of Aswan. All through the season the great hotels disgorge their visitors into it day by day. East and West meet and flow along together, but do not mix. It is like the Blue and White Nile, the one from Abyssinian highlands, the other from the equatorial lakes, which meet at Khartoum and continue northward in a single stream, and yet mile after mile the waters of the one remain distinct from the waters of the other. To suit every equestrian need donkeys, swift and slow, mischievous and docile, are waiting in plenty at the hotel doors and in the streets, and as soon as breakfast is over, and while the air is cool, people set out on the morning's ride.

All roads lead to Rome ; more wonderful still, the road to Philæ leads everywhere. Once within it, the desert is before you, the donkey-boy behind, making his weird but effective noises, in lieu of the stick—and what more can the quest of pleasure seek, or find ! Sometimes the ride provides unlooked-for comedies ; sometimes oneself is the chief actor. Perhaps the donkey stumbles even on level ground, and will insist on taking the broken

and rocky ; or it prefers to keep its own pace, and shows its resentment of all interference by lowering its head and projecting its heels. Indeed, on a donkey, and perhaps especially at Aswan, there is no limit to the possibilities. But always there is the joy of the crisp desert air, and the blue sky and golden desert, a joy heightened by the rush and strife of contending donkeys, when, like Barkis, they are willing, but not entirely foregone even when, like donkeys, they are not.

After leaving the Mohammedan tombs behind, the way lies in the midst of a shallow valley, bounded by low rugged hills of granite. It is the rose-pink granite which supplied the material for giant statues and obelisks and shrines through three thousand years of Egyptian history. It was here that Usertesen came, six hundred miles away, to quarry the obelisks, each seventy or eighty feet high, for the adornment of the temple of On, centuries before Joseph was given to wife "the daughter of Potiphar, priest of On" ; here probably that they came a thousand years earlier for the pillars of the temple of the Sphinx and for the casing of the Pyramids ; and here, a thousand years later, that the great builders came, the Thothmes, Hatshepsets, and Rameses, for those colossal monuments by the score, if not by the hundred, which they scattered broadcast among the sovereign towns of Egypt. In the hills to the left of the road two of the ancient quarries still

remain, the one quite near at hand, the other further and higher into a wilderness of jagged, distorted rocks, among which a carpet of sand gives footing for the donkey. Once the hilly ground begins it is a case of slowly plodding on, scrambling up ledges of rock, stumbling down on the other side, and boring through narrow miniature ravines at continuous risk to knees and shins. How the donkey accomplishes the one, and the rider, less successfully, escapes the other, always remains something of a mystery. But the gain well repays : at one's feet, the quarriers worked thousands of years ago, the marks where a new block had just been started on, another block already breaking from its hold, another partially shaped and polished—all as though the workmen would return to the task to-morrow ; and, far away, endless miles of desolation, westward to the monotonous sand-slopes of Libya, eastward range beyond range of hills of the Arabian desert, like a tumultuous sea.

But the rider bent on pleasure keeps to the level road for another two miles, where he must choose not only between alternative routes, but between the mild and venerable old and the startling and insistent new—both wonderful. A little further on to the right is the Aswan Dam ; round a sudden sweep to the left, through a narrow defile of hills, lies Philæ. Where else in the world is there such another choice ? In Egypt, where nothing changes,

which is a nation of Rip van Winkles awakening from the sleep of ages, it is with a sense of bewilderment that one's eyes first rest on the great dam. Suddenly round a shoulder of hill appears a colony of modern irreproachable bungalows, like a select corner of English villadom, pleasantly situated among terraced gardens, bowered in bougainvillia and shaded with acacia and palm. Along the main road is a post-office, a store, and a tennis-court ; and, at the end of it, the beginning of the gigantic wall which stems the full tide of the Nile at will, so that nine hundred and eighty million tons of water can be stored for the needs of a thirsty land. The wall extends for one and a quarter miles, from the hills on one side of the valley to those on the other ; it is twenty-three feet wide at the top, broadening out in a gradual curve to ninety feet, where it is planted on the rock-bed of the river, and averages eighty-five feet in height. A million tons of stone have gone to the making of it. At intervals and at various levels are the sluices, like cavernous mouths, through which the pent-up water boils and surges—one hundred tons at every mouth, during every second of time—to fill the devious channels of the cataract, and later to reunite into the single, placid, silent stream of the Nile.

The wall is at present being raised another eighteen feet, so that more water may be stored, for

Egypt still cries out for more. Here, among the hills of this far desert, is the scene of toil and of enterprise on a scale commensurate with the greatness of modern civilisation, and exhibiting the latest of modern appliances. Armies of men swarm about the wall like ants on ant-hills. Hydraulic cranes, the hugest ever constructed, spread their great arms to swing the stone from one place to another. For two hours of every day all the hills round ring with the reports of blasting, and in every hour with the sound of hammer and chisel. Trolleys on land, and feluccas on the water, convey the quarried stone to the seat of operations, where native labourers unload it, and, singing or grunting their chanties, carry the blocks to the places required. Altogether it is an extraordinay scene; and one may feel the wonder of it, appraise the wonder, without going so far as the visitor I one day met there who, swelling with national pride, asked if this was not more wonderful than the Pyramids.

The other road at the turning, the road to Philæ, has other scenes and other pleasures. It continues for a further two or three miles along the floor of a winding valley, sometimes wider, sometimes closing in between the fantastic ledges of rock which characterise the granite hills of Aswan. Strabo, a Greek writer of the Augustan age, travelled along this route somewhere towards the beginning of our era, and thus describes it: “Along the whole road

on each side we could see, in many places, very high rocks, round, and very smooth, and nearly spherical, of black, hard stone each rested upon a greater stone, and upon this another : they were like hermæa (*i.e.* unhewn stones, with a head of Mercury upon them). Sometimes these stones consisted of one mass. The largest was not less than twelve feet in diameter, and all of them exceeded this size by one half ".¹ This is the peculiarity of the surrounding hills to-day, for the rose granite of the cataract region does not change even in two thousand years ; they are still mounds of huge boulders, dressed and polished by the ebb and flow of ages.

But Strabo is the most laconic of geographers. Scenery found in him only a scientific observer ; that of Egypt, at any rate, left him cold. I cannot help the belief that he was bored on this road to Philæ, that he found it chilling as a Golgotha, after the mountain gorges of his own birthplace. He made the distance nearly twice as long as it actually is. But he travelled in a waggon, not on the soothing back of a donkey, and likely enough measured it by the jolts and discomforts, as sorrow measures time by heart-beats. True, country more desolate, more gloomy (for the sun blackens the granite, like smoke) could scarce be conceived. Only the beauty of occasional sand-drifts relieves it, where

¹ Strabo, xvii., 50, trans. by W. Falconer.

they sweep in cascades of gold from upland to valley.

But at every step one is retracing the footsteps of history ; rough as the road is, it has been trodden by the makers of history for four thousand years. Here battles were fought throughout Pharaonic times, in the constant feuds between north and south, Egypt and Ethiopia ; here Petronius led his Roman legions against the insurgent army of Queen Candace ; here Christian met Mohammedan in the religious wars of the Middle Ages ; along the road came the savants of Napoleon's expedition a hundred years ago and carved their names on the walls of Philæ ; and perched on the hills around are the forts constructed in our day by the British when they set out to conquer the Soudan, and break the power of the Mahdi. Running lengthwise down the valley are the remains of the wall constructed by Usertesen III., about the time of the patriarch Abraham—a “Roman wall” twenty-four centuries before the Romans built the wall on the English border. It is now a tumbled ruin of stone, brick, and rubble, and, except that it keeps a regular line, might well be mistaken for a natural ridge of the surrounding rocks. Portions still remain in excellent preservation, twenty feet in width and twelve feet high. These people built their walls in war as they constructed their temples and tombs in peace —to last for eternity.

So the road goes on till it suddenly opens in a wide, sandy plain, bounded on three sides by the same gloomy, uncouth rocks, and on the fourth by a lake of blue water, in the midst of which, dim and grey against a background of hills, stands Philæ.

XI

THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

PHILÆ

THERE is a tradition, whether true or false it matters not, that in ancient days it was the custom to celebrate the yearly inundation of the Nile by human sacrifice. When towards the middle of July the river had risen to a certain prescribed height, before the flood-gates were opened, a young girl, decked in bridal raiment—the “Bride of the Nile”—was brought in stately procession to the bank and cast into the swift devouring waters, to symbolise the union that was to take place on the morrow between water and land.

To-day the Nile is once again to have its bride, one of the fairest in all Egypt. Philæ with its temples and sculpture and colour; Philæ with its records in stone of six centuries of men’s doings, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman, and around whose grey walls legends and romance are gathered like the folds of a beautiful garment—once the “Holy

House" of an ancient religious faith, and once again a "local habitation and a name" for the airiest nothings of Arabian myth,—Philæ is to be given to the Nile at its rising. The days are numbered. Already the great wall of the Aswan Dam is being raised; within four or five years the work will be finished, and the head of water behind it increased by a height of eighteen feet or more; and temples, colonnades, and gateways—the architectural wealth and beauty we call Philæ—will be buried beneath the flood.

When the reservoir was constructed in 1903 the injury from an æsthetic point of view was already done. Until then Philæ had been so much more than a cluster of ancient buildings, however interesting. It was a beautiful island, set between two arms of the Nile. The palm-trees growing down by the water's edge, and feathery bushes and creepers clinging to the rocks, made it the sole green spot among the barren islands of the cataract. Amid this greenery, and perched high above the river, rose the pylons, walls, and columns of the temples, some on the central plateau of the island, others situated lower towards the margin: all in all, beyond history, beyond legend and association, a *coup a'ail* such as men might seek the world over, and seek in vain.

"Look here, upon this picture, and on this." The island of yesterday is no more; its undulating shores, palm-trees, and banks of vegetation are sunk

beneath the water ; and the temples which were once picturesquely placed on the slopes and terraces of the island are now cut to one dead level by the surface of the reservoir, out of which their walls now rise. None of the buildings altogether escape the flood; they only differ in the degree of submersion. The main temple of the group, the temple of Isis, which stood on the central plateau of the island, from its lofty situation suffers least. Only the bases of its columns and walls stand in water, and if the visitor be fortunate enough to come when the reservoir is lowest it may still be possible to inspect some of its courts and chambers on foot. All around, in every direction, is havoc and loss. The noble east and west colonnades, which formed the approach from the water-side to the entrance of the temple, are sunk nearly to their capitals ; the gateway of the Emperor Hadrian, with its sculptured records, is half submerged; and, further away, the temple of Augustus is buried to the roof.

Thus are the buildings to-day, as a result of the dam constructed in 1903. Four years hence the level is to be raised another twenty feet. The result is so easy to compute, so grievous to contemplate. Twenty feet added to the present destruction and loss ! Philæ will be represented to future generations by the tops of four gate-towers, a few capitals of the tallest columns, and the level, massive slabs of roofs and cornices. If ever the Muses weep, surely

there is no more fitting occasion for tears than this. It may be some consolation to know that other temples of the same period, even of greater historical interest and more perfectly preserved, exist elsewhere in Egypt; but the solid fact remains that one of the most wonderful groups of ancient buildings in the world—temples great and small, sculptured and coloured ; gateways, porticoes, colonnades, terraces ; the work, through six centuries of the old era and the new, of a dozen Ptolemaic kings and Roman emperors—that all, like the fabled “Bride of the Nile”, are to be given to the devouring waters of the Nile.

They may tell us how many millions of money the reservoir has cost, how many more it is yet to cost ; but the price is Philae. The gold can soon be repaid. Egypt's potential wealth is great ; only water is necessary to make it actual. It is said that the enormous expenditure entailed by the original dam was covered by the profits derived within two years of its completion. The water which nature had provided only by a yearly flood, and which rushed on wastefully to the sea, the great reservoir stored up for future need, giving it sparingly and systematically, as the crops and seasons required. For six years the gain has gone on, and only more water is necessary to make it still greater, to put fresh land under cultivation, to increase the number of annual crops (for in Egypt, so unfailing is the

sunshine, that even three can be grown and garnered in a twelvemonth), and to benefit the poor crowded dwellers of the valley. For this, a whole nation's good, the dam was constructed, and Aswan offered the only practicable site. So was Philæ doomed. The price must be paid : the right hand gives, but sadly the left knows it.

For other consolation we are bidden to look in the place of all others on earth least likely—a Government report. A commission of experts was appointed in 1907 to make a careful examination of Philæ, and to report on the effect already produced on the ruins after the four or five years of partial submersion—after the fashion of a coroner's inquest, solemnly conducted by chemist and engineer, to investigate the condition of the bodily remains, and satisfy law and order, before consigning them to burial. The report discusses the results up to the present, and prophesies those likely to follow in the future, when the reservoir is raised and the buildings sunk another twenty feet. Chemistry is concerned with the various ugly stains which the water leaves on the stone ; engineering reasons about the foundations, and is satisfied. We are reminded that four years before, when the reservoir was constructed and Philæ threatened, a sum of money amounting to £14,000 was spent in strengthening the bases of the temples. Four years had passed, four years had the water been lapping round the

walls and columns, and yet no settlement had occurred in any of the buildings then subjected to treatment. The work had been so well and skilfully done that it had wholly succeeded in preserving the stability of the masonry, and there was every hope it would endure indefinitely—every hope, that is, that Philæ, when the waters pass over it, will sleep unmenaced and undisturbed beneath them.

This is so far well. For sometimes, in the dry season, when the reservoir is for a few weeks at low level, the buildings will re-emerge into light and air; not to gladden the eye of the tourist, indeed, for tourists leave Egypt with the swallow at the earliest signs of summer. But at least the Egyptologist, whose zeal does not need the reappearance of a lost temple to fortify him against heat and torment, will be there to recapture such pleasure as the stained and sodden ruins can longer give. For the marks of nine months' submersion will be on every mural sculpture and inscription, on every moulding and capital. How should it be otherwise? Damp walls are of themselves sufficiently unsightly; but in addition the water of the Nile leaves other stains, other disfigurement. They were noticed especially at high-water level when the foundations of the temple were first submerged, and although the flood has subsided through each summer season, and the higher buildings been left dry for months together, the stains on the masonry have persisted, even

increased. They have given rise to all manner of anxious questioning. Their ugliness was apparent; but were they also injurious? and did they involve erosion of the stone? Only with the publication of the report has the subject been authoritatively dealt with, and from its pages one must gather the few crumbs of comfort it provides. The broad whitish-grey band which runs dado-wise along the walls, as if a paint-brush had been used in malice, is due to a deposit of tiny cryptogramic plants, bleaching in the sun, and is superficial and harmless. Over this are great irregular blotches of glazed moist surface, from which drops of water exude in wet and dry seasons alike. These are widespread and most unsightly of all; they look damp, and they pervade the air with the feel and the smell of damp, like the abandoned well of an old castle donjon. They are caused by a deposit of chemical salts; the porous sandstone soaks up the water, and the salts are deposited both on the surface and in the interstices of the stone. The result is a constant slow chipping and corrosion of stone, and of the figures and inscriptions carved upon it. When the reservoir is raised, the various stains which now run a foot or two above ground will be carried up to capitals and ceiling, and become a frieze round the halls and courts of the temples.

And what of the colour still left on so many of the mural reliefs? what of the colour beyond com-

pare on the eight capitals in the hypostyle hall of the temple of Isis ? When, in after days, the reservoir has reached its highest level, and a visitor comes to Philæ—now a long distance to sail, for the waters will spread far and wide beyond their present shores—and scrambles from his boat on to the roof of the temple, I can imagine his craning over the wall of the court, and, if the colour were still left, and he saw in the dim light the capitals opening their petals like lotus-flowers on the face of the water—I can imagine how the beauty in all this waste and desolation would surprise him, and gladden, and grieve ; gladden at the moment's pleasure for what remains, grieve to think what Philæ was, and no longer is, nor again can be. But likely enough the stains will be smeared over the once beautiful capitals; at best it cannot be hoped that any colour will be left on them. For after centuries of desiccation the pigment lies on the stone almost like the powder on a butterfly's wing. A little lapping of the water, a ripple produced by the wind sucking round the cornices and through portals and roof, and the capitals, coloured twenty-three centuries ago, will be washed bare for ever.

Of all the losses, perhaps this is greatest. Courtyards, colonnades, whole walls of sculpture, yards of inscription, might go, and there would be recompense if the hypostyle hall and its eight grouped columns and eight flowered capitals were spared.

We see them to-day much as they left the hands of the sculptor and the artist three centuries B.C. Nowhere else in Egypt, nowhere perhaps in the world, is it possible to obtain such an impression of the richness and beauty which went to make the glory of an ancient temple, when the sister arts were equally requisitioned, and every sculptured stone was painted in joyous colour. In these capitals at Philæ the old Egyptian order has passed, its plainness and severity gone. They show, as does all the architecture of the Ptolemaic régime, the presence of a new spirit. The national flower, the lotus, is still the model, but instead of representing it as a closed bud or as a full-blown calyx, with hollow outward curve and unserrated lip, like a trumpet, the petals now rise in whorl above whorl, each series opening out more widely than the one below, in arrangement like the acanthus leaves of a Corinthian capital, but still retaining the lotus form. The inventiveness shown in the various elaborate and complex designs of lotus capitals has found still another form of indigenous plant-life to imitate in the palm, which, along with the lotus and papyrus, of all examples of the Egyptian flora is at once the most familiar and the most beautiful. It may be objected that the subject is not an ideal one for sculptural treatment. But at that period, fired with new zeal, fresh ideals, the architect was bent on obtaining rich and varied effects, and his masons were sufficiently

skilled to execute them. There was taste, too, and feeling, in the desire ; the lotus form was too elaborate, too luscious, to reproduce indefinitely ; and, both in proportion and shape, the palm branch provided an effective contrast. In this cluster of capitals, crowning the simple massive columns, like flowers their stems, we see all the wonder of workmanship, the joy, the reach, the skill. On one the petals and sepals of the lotus open widely as though to air and sunshine, but in shape flattened in proportion to the width ; on another a group of palm branches, side by side, tall and graceful, bend outward in a noble sweep of spray and leaf.

And to all this richness of form is added colour. There is no attempt to copy nature—the stems of the palms, for instance, are coloured blue; rather the aim has been to achieve a great decorative effect by the application of brilliant hues to large surfaces of stone in juxtaposition ; and in such exquisite harmony, with such perfect balance are the blues (such blues !) and greens and reds contrived, that the effect is surpassingly beautiful. The Egyptians loved colour, dared greatly in using it. Outside was the glare of sun and desert ; inside the glooms and shades of massive architecture, where the light came, never in a flood, but furtively and diffused. The Gothic architect enriched the gloom from without by stained-glass windows ; the Egyptian, lacking window and glass, adorned it within, and gave

the great hollows and spaces a glory of perpetual, unfading colour. Here we see both intention and method more clearly than in any other temple ; and here, more convincingly, the result. The "Bride of the Nile" is indeed decked in marriage garment ; but the Nile is rising, and at its flood the bride must be given up. It is a grievous loss, known to the whole world, but only felt aright by those who have seen and remember. Oh, the pity of it !

A hundred other treasures have to go in the train of the chief temple, other temples and colonnades, other records, beautiful as art or interesting as archæology, of the life and thought and worship of the Egyptians under their Greek and Roman conquerors. Even the most insignificant of the lesser temples and chambers possesses some special feature. On the roof of the temple of Isis, hidden away in the vast piles of masonry which are the beams and rafters of Egyptian architecture, is a little room dedicated to Osiris. Its walls are covered with bas-reliefs illustrative of the most sacred of all the religious beliefs of Egypt, that pertaining to the god of the dead, Osiris, the husband of Isis, and lord of heaven. Human figures, symbolic designs, hieroglyphs, with their mixture of mysticism and rationality, stand round in clearly cut series, tier above tier. Here the strangest and most occult ritual was performed two thousand years ago ; and here to-

day we see the mysterious emblems of it, and they are meaningless, even grotesque.

On the walls of other chambers are the familiar representations of kings making their offerings to the gods, and of gods bestowing their favours in return, just as in the temples of the New Empire a thousand years earlier. Except that the craftsmanship is different, the art more stereotyped, there is nothing to distinguish them from the rest ; they are the same in subject, the gods the same, the royal worshippers the same, so far as appearance goes—yet not the same, for now the kings of Egypt are not Pharaohs, but Roman emperors, and instead of Rameses and Thothmes, we have the great Augustus, Tiberius, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, even he. He, the Stoic philosopher and moralist, is represented paying homage to the patron deities of Philæ, Isis, and Osiris, like another. Possibly he repaired some portion of the buildings, and his bounty is thus recognised in a mural sculpture. Marcus Aurelius in this place and in such company ! It seems the wildest of anachronisms : he so near to us in temper and spirit, the gods of Egypt so remote, so inalienable. But that is only the first impression ; in reality what a linking up of history, what a proof of the continuity of religious faith through all ages. A hundred phases, one faith ; a hundred cloaks, one central belief, one hope of the heart. “To those who ask”, says Marcus Aurelius,

“Where hast thou seen the gods, or how dost thou comprehend that they exist and so worshipest them? I answer, in the first place, that they may be seen even with the eyes; in the second place, neither have I seen even my own soul, and yet I honour it. This then with respect to the gods: from what I constantly experience of their power, from this I comprehend that they exist, and I venerate them”. To this man it little matters whether the gods be Jupiter or Osiris or Javeh, Athena or Isis, one or many; he has gone behind all, to the truth behind all, where lies the common ground of the spirit-worship of yesterday and to-day. And Marcus Aurelius, Stoic philosopher though he be, can bring offerings of grapes to Isis with as good grace as another.

Some portions of the temple of Isis, even in December, it may be possible to wander about in on foot, and to read its storied walls at leisure. For the Egyptians built their temples, not on one level, but in such a way that, passing from entrance to sanctuary, each hall and each succeeding chamber was gained by steps or by a sloping path. A month earlier the interior is radiant with light and colour. Except in deep and lofty corners it is easy enough to see every line of the mural sculptures. Now the water has risen the walls are moist; the outer court is a pond of muddy water, and the ground of the inner hall sodden; every surface is grey and leaden,

neither reflecting nor taking the light. From the steps leading down to the open court, and through the further doorway in the pylon beyond, one looks out upon a waste of waters. Sometimes Nubian boys, in the hope eternal in the Nubian breast of baksheesh, are there with a cockle-shell of a boat, in which one or two passengers at a time may safely entrust themselves. At the worst the gain is a mud-bath to the knees; at the best a closer view of some fine coloured bas-reliefs of Ptolemies and emperors. The boat cannot pass through the outer door, but stops there to give a melancholy view of the forty or more columns of the two great colonnades which flank the first gate-towers. Only the capitals lie above water; and two miniature ruined temples adjoining them are submerged beyond recognition.

The perilous journey over, a larger boat, manned by half a dozen merry Nubians, waits by the door of the inner court to take visitors a tour of the out-lying buildings. One, the most beautiful of all, stands almost clear of the water. Books, pictures, photographs have made it so familiar that, for many people who have never been, this is the chief, if not the only temple left on the island. It attracts everyone, is photographed, discussed by everyone; and even the tourist who speaks patronisingly of Egyptian architecture in general, is careful to make an exception in the case of "Pharaoh's Bed".

The popular name by which it is everywhere designated is proof of the interest the temple arouses; also, as popular name should, it gives a general notion of the design, which fancy has likened to an old four-poster bed. The low containing wall represents the body of the bed, and at the corners are four columns supporting cornice and roof, like a canopy. In addition to these are three other columns along either side, and two at either end. All arise from the wall, and carry the roof to a height about three times that of the wall. The capitals are lotiform, like those of the hypostyle hall, but unfinished, for the massive abaci which surmount them, and which in their present state seem so disproportionate, were intended for the sculptured heads of the Egyptian goddess Hathor. But for some reason the work was never completed. The temple is said to date from later Roman times, so likely enough the passing of the old order and the coming of the new, the change from paganism to Christianity, interrupted the course of building. The singular grace and beauty of "Pharaoh's Bed" is not its only claim to notice. It gives the double delight of every other beautiful object, which is also unexpected. Not only is there nothing else like it now standing in Egypt, but in design and style it is as far apart as the poles from all that characterises Egyptian architecture. In the latter the temple walls are solid, flat, unrelieved, guarding

the interior wealth of decoration as jealously as prison walls. In this little temple, more Greek in spirit, the beauty is alike within and without. Whence and how it came is the question asked by both archæologist and tourist. And probably in another corner of the island, where the water now lies deepest, is the answer to be found. There, at the far end of the great colonnades, lie the ruins of the earliest of all the temples of Philæ, built by the last of the Pharaohs, immediately before the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great and the dawn of the Greek period. This temple, or vestibule, of Nektanebos is probably the prototype of "Pharaoh's Bed". Some Roman emperor, four or five hundred years later—was it Septimus Severus, who himself visited Egypt at the end of the second century A.D.?—saw and admired the structure, and copied it. But it is almost certain that the temple of Nektanebos is itself a copy of some earlier style, for it was built in a period of decadence, when new and beautiful forms are not created. Probably it represents the great age and art of what historians call the Saïte dynasty, a line of kings who reigned in Egypt in the seventh century B.C., and which saw a sudden and glorious renaissance of all the arts, although, grievously enough, the architecture it produced has long since perished. If "Pharaoh's Bed" really be a perpetuation of the lost style, what a tale it tells, and eloquently, only

as pen and chisel can, of the recuperative power of Egypt, old and hoary not with years but with millenniums ! It proves that under the Saïte princes art was once more emancipated ; that even before Greek influence came from without, the nation was working out its own salvation from within ; that priestcraft, which for tens of centuries had dominated life and thought, shaping their every expression by the old hard unbending rules, was at last losing its ancient power ; and that art and its beautiful products were no longer to be reserved for the benefit of the Pharaoh and the few priests who alone were permitted to enter the temple, but were to be no less for the delight of the whole people. For them, throughout the great days of Thebes, the temples were much what the strong rooms of the Bank of England are to us. They possessed a nation's treasure, but in secret ; their precincts were sacred from all save recognised officials. "Pharaoh's Bed" is beautiful half a mile away, beautiful always and from every side, and gives its beauty to all.

But the perambulation of sunk and water-logged temples is dreary work. The greater the pleasure, the fuller the interest, the keener is the sense of deprivation and loss. Look where one will "the one mute shadow over all" is insistent and all-pervading, like an atmosphere. Sometimes at evening, when the waters of the lake are opalescent and aglow, and Philæ rises from the midst like the

palace of the Arabian myth, there comes a moment of reparation, and, on our part, a moment of reconciliation for the injury done. But soon even this will be denied. There will no longer be the pleasure, touched though it be with sadness, of pottering about among five centuries of temples in a boat or ankle-deep in mud. As the insignificant temple of Augustus is to-day, so then will be the half-dozen glorious temples and vestibules which make up the wealth of architecture, sculpture, and painting called Philæ, the "Pearl of Egypt". To tourists of those days a few piles of shapeless masonry will mark the place, a few richly carved capitals lie on the face of the water,—nothing more.

XII

THE LOG-BOOK OF SS. "PRINCE ABBAS"

I. ASWAN TO KASR IBRIM

Monday.—Leave Aswan at 9 A.M., and train the five or six miles to Shellal, where the *Prince Abbas* lies in waiting. Shellal is now nothing more than a railway terminus, a boat-landing, a refreshment saloon, and a rabble of noisy, importunate natives. Formerly it was a considerable village, thriving on winter tourists; but when the dam was finished the whole region became one vast lake, and Shellal lies placidly beneath its waters. Only the people were left, who, winging as composedly as the bird to some neighbouring valley, now return daily to prey on the visitors who chance there. Spite of them the embarkation is easily effected, and cheaply—thanks to the protection which one may invoke in the name of "Cook",—and we are soon under weigh.

Philæ looks beautiful in the morning light. Since

we were last there the waters have risen, covering the entire island and even the bases of the chief buildings. At this distance, and in the shimmering, hazy light, the effect of the ruins, standing apparently unsupported in the centre of the huge lake, is weird and impressive. The massive Egyptian masonry in such a setting looks unsubstantial, no more architecture, no more belonging to time and place than

“ Magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn ”.

For some little way we steam through the midst of this scene of pure enchantment, hemmed in by a circle of low irregular hills, which melt soft as vapour into a blue dome of sky, and which, like the walls of Philæ itself, look as though they might vanish into thin air at our approach. And, indeed, whichever way one looks across the vast lake, as no other mode of egress seems so appropriate, so none appears more likely. But gradually and almost imperceptibly the hills are drawing closer on either hand—closer and more real—until they lie not more than four or five hundred yards apart, with the water a smooth, gleaming lane between ; and we discover that we have somehow escaped from the hill-locked lake and entered the river.

Whatever the change has brought, it has lost enchantment. The scenery still has its charm, but

it is too near, too gaunt and arid and bare, longer to preserve the mystery which distance and the thinnest of hazes had given to the earlier scene. The banks of the river rise steeply from the water's edge on either side to join the high desert, here and there a fringe of palm-trees lying at their base, or, more rarely, an isolated patch of cereal or pulse, meagre as a child's garden, from which some lonely dweller, in some hidden refuge, draws his supplies. Even these glimpses of green are welcome, though perhaps by contrast, by emphasising the lifelessness and utter desolation of all else the eye rests on, rather than from any inherent charm of their own. But in these first moments of the voyage the mere novelty suffices. For it is new and strange enough to be gazing on a landscape composed of river and hill, and yet to find in it not a single feature that seems friendly or familiar, not one that recalls the memory of accustomed scenes, any more than if one were looking through a telescope on the barren mountains and plains of the moon. This seems not less remote, nor less forbidding; one may be a lover of nature and find the desert an unspeakable monotony.

But not on this cruise to the Second Cataract. By some providential device, unguessed at but gratefully acknowledged, the whole voyage, as we were soon to learn, is an unbroken succession of pleasures and surprises. If the bordering hills grow

monotonous in line and colour, behold a temple! and when the ruin is passed, surely enough we enter reaches of river which greet us with the broadest, most convincing smile of which an Egyptian landscape is capable—a landscape of green fields, a hamlet, and a mosque lifting its white minaret high into the blue. If, again, we grow weary of idleness, weary—if that be possible—of basking full-length in the sun with a book and tags of desultory talk, we have scarcely realised the fact when the ship draws into shore, and the dragoman's voice rouses us to some fresh wonder of the desert, and to a tramp across the loose, burning sand.

Our first excitements are the little temple of Dâbûd, close by the river-side, and, some way further along, a graceful group of columns, which alone remain to mark the temple of Kartassi. The ruins are of too little importance to visit, and too far away to stand out clearly from the rocks among which they lie. But even so they prove the source of an astonishing degree of interest among the passengers, and of a portentous display of field-glasses and cameras. The dragoman slyly remarks that these manifestations of activity are not unusual on the first day of the voyage; and when I express some concern at the lavish use of films, he assures me, with the most comical smile and wink, that they will perhaps last as long as the zeal.

An hour later the river suddenly narrows down

to a width of three or four hundred yards, and the scenery as rapidly changes. We are now hemmed in between precipitous walls of rock from one to two hundred feet in height, riven and tortured into the most fantastic shapes, sometimes receding into deep bays, sometimes standing out in rude, massive headlands. Compared with this, the shining banks of sand seemed friendly and smiling. If Childe Harold had come to the "dark tower" by water, and not by land, this is the kind of scene he might have experienced. I wonder what Gray would have thought of it—Gray who, first among Englishmen, felt the beauty of nature in her nobler aspects, yet looked on the "impending rocks" of Borrowdale with positive fear, and would venture not a step further? But our little steamer hurries on in the most reassuring fashion, through mile after mile of the craggy gorge, the abrupt windings of which provide a constant succession of sombre pictures. Along this reach lie the temples of Tafeh, charmingly situated in a green oasis of palm and sycamore, and of Kalâbsheh, and the adjoining rock-temple of Bêt-el-Walî, opening half way up a little sand-driven hill. But these we leave to visit on the return journey.

About this stage the dragoman reminds us that we are in the Tropic of Cancer. The heat seemed greater than anything I had experienced—even before the information was given! Many of

the passengers have gone to seek the cool and shade of their cabins ; the rest of us are sprawling about on deck, steeped in sunshine, and, I hope, in peace.

Immediately after tea we are landed to see the rock-temple of Gerf-Husen, one of the many temples which mark, like milestones, the triumphal progress of Rameses II. It dates from the fourteenth century B.C. The work in it is said to be poor and of little interest. But still the entire building is hewn out of the living rock, and in this should be interest enough for many a visit. As engineering, as evidence of skill and patience and endurance—of a dozen other qualities,—these rock-hewn monuments of the old Egyptians provide inexhaustible wonder. But, chief wonder of all, is the poetry, the imagination of a race that could see such possibilities in the heart of a desert rock, find material in the very waste and refuse, as it were, of nature, and take it just as and where nature had abandoned it ; then, on a scale as big and lavish as her own, transform it into order, shapeliness, and beauty. Here, as in all such temples, the sculptor, like Mohammed, went to the mountain. What the latter did when he got there only the good Mohammedan can tell. But the Egyptian wrestled with it, like a Titan, till it brought forth a temple fit to house his gods. Only a heart sustained by spiritual ardour could have persevered in such a task.

Even this least among rock-temples shows the

grandeur of the design, the thoroughness of purpose, the dexterity of workmanship. It was not enough merely to tunnel in the rock. The rock-front must be chiselled into a façade, sloping like the walls of a pylon, and the space before it levelled so as to form a spacious court surrounded by a colonnade. Of the latter only two lotus-columns, worn and battered, and five pillars are left standing; but they serve to convey some idea of the court as it once was. Beyond the portal are the great hall, forty-five feet square, whose roof is supported by six colossal statues of Rameses, twenty-eight feet high, and lesser chambers and recesses, spreading further and wider into the rock. On the walls are sculptured the usual religious representations of the king bringing offerings to the gods, and the gods bestowing their divine favours in return. No wonder Herodotus marvelled at the piousness of the Egyptians. Gods, worship, praise, oblation provide the subjects for decoration from floor to ceiling. At Gerf-Husen the deities are gathered together in greater force than is customary. It is a great opportunity for the dragoman. What a burden to unfold!—Ammon-Ra, Ptah, Sekhet, Ra-Harmachis, Khnum, Hathor—are not these names to give pause to the most flippant? Then a fabulously remote date, to brood over with appropriate awe; the reading of mysterious signs, like a second Daniel,—and all delivered singly and consecutively, so we were led to under-

stand, in three different languages, to suit the various needs of his audience !

One incident connected with the visit I shall not soon forget. However wild and solitary the situation, and whether a village be in sight or not, the usual crowd of natives awaits the steamer. The numbers on this occasion were smaller than most, and among them my eyes were drawn to the figure of a young girl with a baby—her own—in her arms. She walked beside us with some show of girlish curiosity, but this too innocent to spoil the fine nobility which showed in her whole bearing. I had never seen a more beautiful face, beautiful as judged by whatever standard. A clear wide brow, overhung with a mass of black hair, parted down the middle and loosely drawn back on either side, where it was lost beneath a light blue shawl, which hung negligently over head and shoulder; almond-shaped eyes, so familiar in ancient Egyptian art, full of depth and lustre; nose and mouth and chin finely chiselled, and lips that revealed whitest teeth,—these were joined with an expression half disdainful, half inquisitive, and tinged with a strange, wistful, haunting melancholy which was never disturbed into more than a transitory smile by the antics of the other children. She seemed a princess, stepped down from one of the old frescoes, awaiting a Pharaoh who should never come to take her. I wondered who her husband was—another waif, maybe, from the royal days

of Nubia? If the Mohammedan rule binds them—as is almost certain—and if the man knew her not, never saw her, before the bridal day, what were his thoughts when the veil was lifted, and he first beheld his wife? A new force was given to the old Scripture phrase, and surely “then did the friends of the bridegroom rejoice when they heard the bridegroom’s voice”. May the shades of Isis rest over her! Incidentally I thought of Othello, of the endless disquisitions written in doubt of the possibility of a European’s being in love with a man of dusky complexion (not a black, as some have ignorantly supposed Othello). The face of the Nubian girl was a whole commentary on the subject.

After Gerf Husen the scenery grows more monotonous. The river banks are low to the water, and pass away to undulating desert, broken by mounds of rock and piles of boulder, as though scattered by volcano.

At seven o’clock, after a beautiful sunset, the boat anchors for the night at Dakkah. We first have dinner, in all the comfort and luxury of an Atlantic liner, and then set out to visit the ruined temple which lies three hundred or four hundred yards back from the river. The evening is deliciously cool, and wonderful with all the beauty of an Eastern night. The whole village has turned out to watch our movements. And what a picturesque company they make, old and young, arrayed in white turbans and

flowing robes of many generous colours, and grouped with that naturalness and repose of which all Eastern people, like the cattle of an English pasture, have the secret. The elders of the village remain seated on the bank, silent, solemn, imperturbable, much as though our advent had been wholly unexpected. Really, it was the excitement of a week ! The rest, the more considerable portion, follow us to the ruins, towards which we plod through deep shifting sand, and stumbling promiscuously over formidable stones, in the insufficient light of a low moon and some half-dozen candles.

The temple lies with its long axis parallel to the river, *i.e.* north to south, in contrast to other Nubian temples. We see nothing of the pylon beyond its massive size and solidity. We climb to the top and sit there some time, enjoying the extensive view of pale, moon-lit desert, and, in special degree, the delicious cool of the air—the first we had felt through the day. Where the court stood are now great piles of stone, and beyond is a group of chambers, also much ruined. By the miserable light of our candles we make out many of the mural sculptures, and traces of paintings of Coptic workmanship which are still left over the inscriptions of the earlier religion. But indeed it is an unsatisfactory way of paying a visit, an only visit, to a great temple. The gain is that of a novel experience, and all manner of pleasant sensations—but not of archæological origin.

Nor do the guide-books help—they rarely do when the troubled mind calls loudest for it—though, with that perversity which abounds in human nature, and most abounds in the authorised cicerone, they do drag in one inconsequent page of lurid history associated with Dakkah which it is appropriate to recall amid the shadows and gloom of a night visit. The temple was built by a certain king of Ethiopia named Arq-Amen, in the third century B.C. According to the historian Diodorus, there was a curious rule held at that time in the country. The priests were in the habit, whenever it pleased them, of sending a message to the king that he should put himself to death, for that such was the pleasure of the gods. The various kings concerned appear to have fulfilled their share of the arrangement with unfailing regularity—all save Arq-Amen. For this prince, “bred up in the Grecian discipline and philosophy”, in despite of such commands, took a force of men along with him, entered the sanctuary of their temple, and cut the throats of every priest of them.

Possessed of this knowledge, and after many bumps and jolts and more laughter, we return, some time after the rest of our party, to find the elders of Dakkah still sitting motionless on the river bank. The younger folk, emboldened by an hour's distant acquaintanceship, had become more familiar and effervescent, and seemed willing to make a night of it, till the word from some un-

known seat of majesty was spoken, and the crowd melted into the silent desert.

Tuesday.—Awakened while yet dark by the starting engines. From that time, half asleep, half awake, I lie watching the swift changes of an Eastern dawn. Tea is served at 7.30, the boat draws to land, and we trudge ankle-deep in sand to the small ruined temple of Es-Sabūa. What a carpet for a temple to rest on! The sand shimmers like gold dust in the slanting light of the sun, and spreads away in gentle undulations far as eye can see, the little temple the sole landmark of the plain. It is this solitariness, this isolation from all human affairs, of the temples of Nubia, which fits so well with their age and impresses it so vividly on the imagination. Not a vestige remains of the towns which once clustered round them. No modern dwellings have succeeded those long since gone. Time has cast them up, as the sea its wrecks, on distant, lonely shores, and there—for those who are blest to go and see—it is easiest to pay them the homage due to monuments so venerable and so mighty.

Es-Sabūa is partly built, partly excavated in the rock. It is another of Rameses the Great's temples—the man who built temples as a man to-day might endow libraries and be accounted memorable. An avenue of sixteen sphinxes leads up to it, some of them buried in the constantly drifting sand. Beside the first, on either side, stands a colossal statue, worn

and sadly mutilated, of the king. One of the urchins, who had by this time gathered in considerable numbers from nowhere, climbed to the summit of the colossus with the dexterity of a monkey, and looked down upon us from a height of twenty feet with a broad grin. I examined the statue and was more than ever mystified as to how the feat had been performed. I looked back from the crumbling, vertical stone to the boy atop of it; but the smiling face overhead, though, like the Sphinx, it seemed to acknowledge my questioning, still smiled, and sphinx-like kept its secret. They are delightful children, these bright-eyed, shining-teethed Nubians, full of wickedness and mirth, and after their kind well-featured and attractive in appearance; but, alas, they are rapidly becoming ruined—their natural mischievousness turning into acquired impudence—by the continual flood of visitors and the culpable provision, on the part of the latter, both of familiarity and baksheesh. On this occasion the whole number entered into the humour of the position—the agility of their companion, my astonishment—and laughed the high-pitched laugh of children's voices the world over. This, indeed, proved to be the chief incident of the morning's expedition, for our round of the temple amounted to little more than a tour of bare walls and sand-drifts. The great court of former days is silted up with sand and debris to such a height as to forbid entrance to the halls

and chambers behind, thus preserving in safety, but to our loss, among much else of interest, a fine fresco of St Peter, left to record the brief term of Christianity in Egypt.

“But what went ye out for to see?” asks the *Cynic* on our return to the boat. (The *Cynic* was the companion of our voyage, providentially designed to play Greek chorus in the Nile drama.) A literal answer might sound empty as the reed shaken by the wind, but it can be spoken with no reproach by those who return from a walk in the crisp cool air and the caressing light of morning in the desert.

From Korosko (the starting-point from earliest times of the caravan route to Abu Hamed) the scenery once more completely changes. A belt of green lines either bank, in some places so wide-spread and so shady as to resemble, from a distance, reaches of the Thames. Here and there a rugged buttress of rock frowns above the water, but generally the banks are low and undulating, with sprawling, leafy bushes overhanging them, in bowers luxuriant enough to tempt “a green thought in a green shade”, and thrice welcome to eyes that see hedge-rows and copses only as Kinglake heard the village bells, in idle dreams of the desert. It needs only the notes of a thrush starting from the leafage to complete the illusion of England and home; but in Egypt no birds sing. And it is Egypt, spite of a more generous verdure, for beyond it are wide stretches of sand,

and beyond that again clumps of jagged hills with more sand lying in their crevices, smooth and shining and relentless, like snow. The river narrows to two hundred yards, then widens out into great pools, out of which no way seems possible. The windings are constant and sudden, at each new vistas opening out, new plays of light and colour, and unexpected glimpses of valley beyond valley—all desolate, and yet relieved from the ugliness of desolation by the warm gold and browns in which the landscape is drawn.

A little while after noon we again draw into shore. No village lies in sight; but a couple of hundred yards back, perched on a low mound, stands the miniature temple of Amada. A less promising wreck, as seen from the outside, time has never cast up on any shore. In size it is scarcely more pretentious than the fellah's mud-hut, yet withal the rude stones, Druidical in form and massiveness, of which walls and roof are constructed, give to the whole structure an appearance of venerable antiquity. So much the greater, by contrast, is the finished beauty within. Its chambers are few and small, and no more than nine or ten feet in height. They possess not a single architectural feature of interest. But—the walls, the carving, and the colour! Pencils of light pierce through crevices and openings of the masonry, and the dim spaces glow with hues of the rainbow, some subdued in shadow, some sparkling, dancing

in the sunbeams. Every sculptured figure, every hieroglyphic on wall and lintel, retains its colour, brilliant surely as the day, thirty-five centuries ago, on which the artist bent over his work. The delight of such repose for eyes aching with the glare of yellow, scorching desert can hardly be conceived. It is like turning from the dusty road into a garden of shade and flowered borders. And one would linger willingly in the one as in the other. Sensations, thrilling enough for one day at least, might be obtained by merely passing to and from desert and temple—on the principle practised by Keats of swallowing pepper by way of preparation

“. . . . For a draught of vintage that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth”.

But there is hardly time to recover from the feeling of bewitchment, from the sight of the feast spread—for indeed there is scarce a hieroglyphic on the walls but is worth careful notice, so beautifully is every detail executed,—before the dragoman’s voice calls a retreat. Possibly further experiences might have blotted out some of the first rapture. If so, I keep my delusion, inscribed ineffaceably in memory—Amada!

For the next few miles the river grows in charm; the fringes of green are almost continuous, and more, they broaden out at times into rolling acres of vegetation. Labourers, both man and donkey,

are busy in the fields, the former hoeing and reaping, the latter mournfully ambling from place to place, so laden with produce that only head and tail show from beneath the loose burden. The pleasure these sequestered scenes of husbandry give is derived rather from change and variety than from any special charm in themselves. They are agricultural without being pastoral. They show the grim, hard, lonely toil—the prose of Arcadia,—and miss its poetry. The figure stooping at the hoe is not the idyllic labourer of Millet's art, but the toiler in Madox Brown's “Work”, from whose life of drudgery joy has fled. The fact is that in all these straggling oases of the Upper Nile one never loses the sense of man's unequal struggle with nature, and of the poverty and squalor and loneliness entailed in the process.

Towards four o'clock we anchor at the foot of a lofty hill, shaped like a sugar-loaf, and rising immediately from the water's edge, on which stand the ruins of Kasr Ibrim. After tea we set out to climb the winding path to the summit, over loose burning stones, but cheered by the prospect of a fine view, and not a little relieved, perhaps, to think that the object of the enterprise is not Egyptological, but something quite refreshingly modern—being, indeed, nothing more remote than a Roman fortress. The ruined walls, Roman and mediæval, are built to the undulations of the hill, and entirely girdle its

summit. Many fine bits of the earlier work, in stone and mud-brick, remain, inextricably mixed up with later work and piles of debris common to both. In the midst of this wilderness of ruins stands a Byzantine church, of which three noble arches, a column, and much of the containing walls are still in excellent preservation. This alone more than repays the labour of the climb. In the Middle Ages the church was converted into a mosque, and certain additions made on the east side. It was then, apparently, that the Byzantine columns were pulled down. One, with a cross carved on it, was made into the step of a doorway—it is still there—in order that everyone who passed through should trample on the sacred symbol. But the whole mass of buildings, Roman, Byzantine, Mohammedan, sacred, military, domestic, is so tumbled about, so confused, that we leave with an uneasy sense of difficulties unsolved.

We then turned to the sunset. I clambered on to the top of one of the ruined walls, with nothing between me and the horizon. The sky had been strewn with drifts of cloud all day—a rare occurrence in Upper Egypt, and generally an occasion for some grumbling, for one comes to look on clouds as a personal affront. After a single dull day I have heard the comment, “What’s the use of coming to Egypt if we are to have this sort of thing !” Could ingratitude go further ? But the gain comes at even-

ing ; and that was our hope as we sat there waiting. At our feet stretched an eternity of desert : on the Arabian side, mountainous, dark, forbidding—the very abomination of desolation ; westward, the Libyan plains, dotted over with low conical mounds of rock, like pyramids spread on a carpet of glowing sand.

As the sun went down I chanced to see a little way off among the ruins an Arab, one of our crew, at prayer. He had quietly withdrawn while the rest of us were intent on the sunset. If he noticed me perched on the wall above him, it did not appear in the least to disturb his devotions. I hope not; I hope still more that he did not suppose I was there from idle curiosity, or remained unmoved. For, indeed, the sight of that lonely figure praying among the ruins of Roman Emperors and Turkish Sultans seemed to me more impressive than all the ritual of the churches. I watched the various strange attitudes which accompany Mohammedan prayer from beginning to end, but they no longer seemed strange ; and when they were done, I found that my own face, like his, had been turned away from the sunset, which I had gone there to see. For nearly an hour longer we lingered at the place, and then descended down the northern slope of the hill in face of a full moon and the bluest of skies.

After dinner some of the crew came on deck to sing and dance for us. They sat round in a circle—some

dozen of them—in the curiously listless, apathetic posture of the native. The leader accompanied, with rhythmic slaps and twiddles on a small gourd-shaped tom-tom; while another—the only other instrumentalist—with closed eyes and lugubrious visage, and bending head and body slowly from side to side, plied a long iron nail pendulum-wise between two empty bottles placed on the floor about a foot apart. The songs were antiphonal in form, one of the chorus chanting a monotonous stave, and the rest responding in unison—the whole suggesting Gregorian psalmody limited to half an octave or so, and muttered through lips nearly closed. They sang earnestly and with the most obvious enjoyment, but never altering the quantity of tone, never varying the expression, and always in the most precise time. They sang, moreover, like Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper", as if their song could have no ending. More than once we grew anxious. It seemed as if nothing short of shipwreck could disturb the continuity; and what finally did interfere I was never able to discover; the dragoman, whom I consulted, assuring me it was not the usual cause, namely, the *end* of the song!

During the performance the *Cynic* had turned to me and, with an air of great solemnity, muttered,

“‘Strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of death’”.

But that was only his playfulness ; for in reality, as appeared later on when he began to discuss native music learnedly, and with no little warmth, he had long been deeply interested in it, and was prepared to defend its claims not only to serious consideration, but even to the tribute of affection. True, in his own case, the interest was rather ethnological and historic than æsthetic. He told us that some of the songs we had heard were probably as ancient as the temples, and had come down through the ages as little changed ; and that many of the meaningless words which occurred in them—like the incoherent jingles in the choruses of our own folk-songs—were actually straight out of the vocabulary which we saw written in hieroglyphics in pyramids and temples, some of them, for instance, the names, now corrupted almost beyond recognition, of the ancient deities. Possibly we had heard this very night strains that had charmed the court of a Rameses, or a lullaby once sung over the cradle of the infant Moses; or, he added mischievously, “‘ Much more likely than the nightingale’s,

“‘ The selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ’”.

But the *Cynic*, being at heart more humanist than cynic, liked the native music for what it is ; not because of its ancient lineage, but because of its

value, its significance to-day. It is all the Egyptian possesses in this kind. He has neither music of the stream nor of the woods. His sole teacher is the silence of the desert. But he has a light heart, and he sings; a lonely, toilsome life, and he relieves the solitude and the drudgery with a song. In proportion as his notes are few and unmelodious, he croons over them the more fondly, and, like the cuckoo, with untiring reiteration, unfaltering gusto. You hear the song, and laugh ; you see the singer and laugh no longer, for the joy it gives him, the release, the forgetfulness. Instead of the harshness, the crudity, you feel now the pathos of it ; and the very monotony, like that of the caged bird, self-taught and unaided, makes it more pathetic, makes it thereby less wearisome. All Egypt would not produce a voice acceptable to the humblest English village choir, nor a single stave to serve the comprehensive needs of a Strauss symphony ; yet all Egypt sings. Men and children, at work and at play, break into song as naturally as the bird. Pulling a waggon, or hauling a rope, or heaving a stone, they accompany all their labours with a chanty appropriate to the occasion, in which one gives the call and the rest answer ; breves, semibreves, minims, and crotchets marking in exact time the rhythmic movements of arms and legs. In this way I have heard a hundred boys relieve the monotony, digging in the heat and dust of the desert.

- When the concert was over, the crew danced for us—a dance more strange, more crude, more formless than the song, but doubtless requiring more skill. At the end they solemnly rose, and in one voice, and one volley, discharged at our ears their whole English vocabulary : “ Hip, hip, hurrah !—Thank you very much !—Very good !—Very nice ! ” They repeated the strange medley at each contribution of baksheesh. But they entered into the absurdity of the situation in the drollest fashion possible.

XIII

THE LOG-BOOK OF SS. "PRINCE ABBAS" (*continued*)

II. ABU SIMBEL

Wednesday.—Wake early, and watch from my bunk the low purple hills gliding along between me and the grey dawn. Up at 6.30, by which time all the east is aglow, like a sullen fire, though the sun still lurks behind the furthermost ridges of the desert. To-day is a day of expectations and high hopes. Abu Simbel has lived in my dreams beside the Sphinx—in the Egyptian firmament “a star by a star”, for nothing less than a snatch of Swinburnian song fits the occasion and the mood, when the dream of a lifetime is to be realised. The thought of disappointment never for a moment obtrudes : some alchemy has transmuted the dull alloy of the man’s coldness, scepticism, and apprehension into the child’s curiosity and faith. The general stir aboard shows the general disposition. No sooner is breakfast over than a movement is

made for the seats at the forepart of the deck. Field-glasses busy after long quiet, abrupt conversation never straying far from the one topic, bustle in everything—these, the marks of something more than mere interest, might have aroused curiosity in the most casual and uninstructed observer. Only the *Cynic*, already mentioned, seated with pipe and novel as far aft as possible, appears unconcerned, though earlier on he had been heard to mutter his comment on the unusual proceedings in the words of “Truthful James”—

“Do I wake, do I dream,
Do I wonder, or doubt,
Are things what they seem,
Or is visions about ?”

But we, with our glasses and our hopes, sitting where a first glimpse can be caught, may well afford to ignore the sarcasm.

It is ten o'clock, and we know we cannot be far away, though our dragoman refuses more precise information. He guards the secret as completely as the surrounding desert, which, mile after mile, hangs low to the riverside and passes away to the horizon in undulating monotony, not a hill throughout the wide plain high enough to serve the needs of Rameses the Great and his temple-builders. At length an eminence appears of much more imposing size and character, a mountain

among the pigmy hillocks around it. It seems at first to be out in the desert, altogether away from the line of the river, but as we draw nearer, and after following many curves, there, in a fine semi-circular sweep of river and hill, is the lofty mass of rock standing sheer above the water, and, on its breast, the unmistakable sculptures, made familiar by a hundred pictures and books, of Abu Simbel. At the distance the figures are tiny, yet so distinct, so perfectly defined, as to give the impression of being near at hand, like a landscape seen through an inverted telescope, in which every object appears in little. But in these clear regions of desert and sky distances are as deceptive as in a mountain pool : in reality, as the diminutive sculptures show, the temple is still far away. The rest of the journey is mental confusion, in which wonder and astonishment, growing in inverse ratio to the time and space between us and the rock, predominate. At last we are anchored at the foot of the cliff, which stands some yards back from the river, and below the temple and below the great stone faces which keep their watch eternally across the desert.

There, with their backs to the mountain out of which they are carved, sit the colossal figures of Rameses the Pharaoh, once, twice, three times repeated—four times they once were, but the head and shoulders of the fourth now lie in two enormous masses and a pile of scattered debris on the ground.

Every line, every feature of the king is magnified from the puny proportions of a man to those of figures sixty-five feet in height. Not a single stone was added in the shaping of them; each statue, chair, and pedestal is carved in one piece out of the living rock. In front there was no dromos of sphinxes forming an avenue to the portal of the temple, no court surrounded by colonnades, such as we saw at the lesser rock temples of Gerf Husen and Es-Sebûa, because there was no space available for external construction, though formerly a flight of steps led from the river up the steep bank to the entrance of the temple. The mountain itself, standing a little way back and rising in a bold and rugged mass into the blue, had to provide the builder with the material for his entire temple, outside and inside alike. Leaving material for the four mighty statues, he cut and dressed the face of the rock behind it into a sloping trapeziform wall, one hundred and thirty-two feet wide and ninety-two feet high, like the pylon of an ordinary temple, leaving the natural rock on either side, when hewn to a proper angle, to form a bold massive buttress, well suited to frame such a picture. The area thus formed is the façade of the temple—the front of the cliff—and the background of the colossi. Such a space, so vast, and towering as it does to a crest of rugged hill and the upland desert, might have satisfied the famished soul of Andrea del

Sarto when a half-hour's peace had bidden it soar again :—

“ In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls of the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo, and me
To cover ”.

If Andrea had seen the huge vacant spaces of Egyptian architecture, he might have risen to the chances of this world—who knows ?

But there was neither Rafael nor Leonard, Agnolo nor Andrea to fill them. Yet the sculptors of Abu Simbel, staggering as the task was, rose to it. It was nothing less than to cover a bare mountain face, twelve thousand feet square, with such sculpture as should give it richness and beauty worthy a temple intended to match the other architectural achievements of the Pharaoh Rameses, such as the hall at Karnak, the great court, pylon and colossi at Luxor, and the glorious mortuary temple at Thebes. A bold cornice runs along the top of the façade consisting of twenty-two cynocephali, each of which is seven feet high, and beneath it is a double frieze of hieroglyphs and symbols, finely designed and deeply cut so that they may appear impressive even at such a height. These form the only general scheme of decoration, though in addition there is over the richly carved portal a

colossal bas-relief of the god Ra-Harmachis, and on either side a figure, incut, of the king making offerings. But the façade, with all its sculpture, was only intended as a background for the colossi, and, rightly enough, nothing there is allowed to distract the eye from the four statues of seated majesty.

The remainder of the morning we spend within the temple. Wonderful as the exterior is, the interior is perhaps the more entirely satisfying. It matches the former in scale and grandeur ; it exceeds it in richness of decoration, and in its beauty and concentration of design. The first peep into the great hall is an experience never to forget. The light from the high doorway streams down the central aisle, throwing into clear relief the four colossal statues which bound it on either side, then passes on through a lesser doorway into a pillared hall beyond, and is lost at last in the darkness of chambers and sanctuaries still further in the heart of the rock. In its path patches of colour linger on the grey stones like the reflections from “storied windows richly dight”, giving to the sculptured space an effect of extraordinary beauty. But it is the mighty statues, supporting the roof, that make the aisle glorious. These colossal figures of the king, standing in front of enormous piers, seem to bear the burden, not of the roof alone, but of the whole mountain overhead. Each is thirty feet in height, but, great as the scale is, they are finely

proportioned—kingly every inch of them,—and on the faces sits an expression of commanding intelligence and dignity. Beyond is a lesser hall, whose roof is supported by four plain square pillars, and beyond that again, and in pitch darkness, lies a narrow vestibule which gives entrance to the sanctuary. In this last are four coloured sculptures of Rameses and three deities seated side by side. Thus for one hundred and eighty feet the temple passes on room after room into the rock, other eight great chambers, like long galleries, spreading out laterally.

From floor to ceiling every available inch of surface is covered with incised reliefs, showing the Pharaoh indiscriminately worshipping his gods and slaying his enemies. The temple was constructed to commemorate the great victory over the Hittites at Kadesh, and it is made to fulfil its purpose with all the childish relish of an egoist. One whole wall is given to a description of the battle itself. It is an Egyptian Iliad, with Rameses the Achilles of the piece. Thanks to the electric light supplied by the steamer, it is possible to decipher the incidents of war and war's alarms. What a moving drama it is: the marching army; the bustle of camp; councils of the general staff; foe grappling with foe; and the king in his chariot, surrounded by adversaries, alone, yet undismayed, invincible. And then the truce: the dead lying about the field; the living succouring the wounded, or resting apart after their

labour, or carousing together in heedless revelry ; and, last of all, the king again, not the hero but the tyrant, watching while his hirelings number the severed hands which prove the full measure of victory. Among all this intricacy of design from wall to wall there are two striking figures of the king, boldly drawn, and in "act more graceful", with his club swung on high, and vigour and movement in every limb. Crude as the art is, there is life in it, and sincerity, and its strong deep lines give to the vast walls an extraordinary richness.

As we wander on we find that one of the side chambers is unfinished. Part of the walls are sculptured ; elsewhere the designs are outlined in colour ready for the chisel which was never used. Why the work thus suddenly ceased, no one knows. But for some reason, known only to the shades of Abu Simbel, it was abandoned when a few more days would have completed it ; and the tools were dropped, as though at the close of the day's task, never again to be lifted.

While we are still lost in the wonder of the place, still finding in gloomy corners or among deep shadows new sculptured devices and exquisite remnants of colour, the dragoman reminds us that there is another temple to visit. As if Abu Simbel were not sufficient for one day ! Yet one must needs preserve a capacious appetite when the Pharaohs have spread the feast. So we obediently follow the call,

rather fortified by the hope that we shall the sooner be back again, than eager for fresh excitement.

The lesser temple, the temple of Hathor, rock-hewn by Rameses in honour of his wife Nefert-Ari out of the same range of hill, lies only a couple of hundred yards from the other, and is reached by a rough pathway which winds through scrub and over rock along the river bank. Between the two temples it is but a question of the glory of the sun and the glory of the moon. The temple of Hathor would tempt sight-seers from the uttermost parts of the earth, and repay the visit, if Abu Simbel were not there. But it is smaller, simpler, less lavish and magnificent, dare I say it? more ladylike—merely the tribute to a wife at the gracious hand of a king who had first secured a monument to his own majesty. Its interior is only a lesser copy of Abu Simbel, and is therefore, after the other, of little interest; though the representations on the first pair of pillars of the youthful Rameses and the girlish Nefert-Ari, still retaining their brilliant colour, are pictures to linger over, even while colossi wait. But the great feature of the temple is its façade, so much less stupendous than the other, but so widely different, and, as some authorities think, even more perfect in conception and design.¹ But still it does not lift

¹ *Vide* Perrot and Chipiez, *A History of Art in Ancient Egypt*, vol. i. p. 410.

one outside oneself, its giant figures do not belong to a race of demi-gods, like those four brothers of Abu Simbel, in whose presence one feels, verily,

“a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused”—

something akin to the spirit of time and space, of sky and living air and round ocean, that rolls through all things. Instead of four, the façade of this temple has six colossal figures, representing the king and queen in the guise of various gods and goddesses. Compared with the others they look small enough, yet in reality they are thirty-four feet high. They stand side by side, three on either side the doorway, and separated from one another by magnificent buttresses of rock, which continue the sloping face of cliff downwards, and serve to give an appearance of massive solidity and at the same time to provide richly sculptured frames for the colossi. There are six of them—the temple is dedicated to Hathor, a goddess, in memory of Nefert-Ari, the wife ; and yet Rameses, the arrant egoist, appropriates tour to himself ! Was ever a case so flagrant of giving with one hand and taking back with the other ?

After lunch we rest a while. The heat of sun and sand is too formidable to face. Besides, there are memories to turn over ; out of confusion, to secure a little order. Yet the temptation is too strong long

to resist, and the heat is rapidly lessening. We leave the boat, and the sleepers, and scramble up the sand-drift which is fed from the desert above through a narrow gorge in the rock and spreads out like a golden robe round one side of the temple down to the river bank. The ascent is difficult ; at every step the loose sand gives way, leaving one's foot but an inch or two beyond its former position. But only by climbing the drift is it possible to get on a level with the faces of the colossi. And there are sixty feet of the snail's progress to make before the necessary height is obtained. At last we reach the point which seems to give the best view. Wearied and breathless we sprawl on the burning sand—such sand ! A movement of hand or foot sets loose a crystal stream of gold which glistens and dances down the slope like an impalpable tissue of red and yellow light. None know what sand is till they have seen that of Nubia, fresh blown by the wind, and every grain of it sparkling in the sun. On such a golden carpet do we lie watching the giant faces, or, rather, that of the southernmost statue, which is by far the finest.

We watch the many changes—the one wondrous change—as the lights and shadows of evening play upon it, ever moving and deepening on different features, strengthening or softening a line here or there until, like Hawthorne's "great stone face"

on the distant mountain, this face also relaxes its stony gaze, and lives. It is a trick of the light, the intense clear light of the desert, playing among the hollows and eminences of a human face twelve times magnified and suffusing its sandstone countenance with the hues of flesh ; not a frolic of the imagination. At such an hour and in such a place illusion becomes easy ; but here it is sustained, and stays our questioning, though it answers not. Even the *Cynic* has ceased to joke. When, some hours earlier, in the glare of mid-day, we had only come to a sober praise of the statue, and admitted its intelligence of expression, and dignity, and strength—even then the *Cynic* looked serious, and ventured with unusual feeling his stolen comment :

“ The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone ”.

Now he watches with the rest of us, in silence. His comment recurs to mind. It is curiously apt—“Voyaging through strange seas”—but not of “thought”, rather of time and space, and of both an eternity. For this is the singular, the bewitching quality of two faces beyond all others I have seen, that of the Sphinx and of this colossus of Abu Simbel. In the former the look is wilder, quizzical, perplexed ; in this, calm and undismayed, as of a mind in possession of the far-off secret, and satisfied ; but both are gazing across the desert,

and past it, across the hidden sea, and past that. It is this quality of the great stone faces that haunts one, but at Ghizeh uneasily; here, and in this soft light of evening, tranquilly. The gentle expression about the lips and mouth has melted into a smile, and it is a smile of ineffable peace.

So we watch, until the last change of all. The sun has long gone down, the glow passed, and a full moon—the large luminous moon of Egypt—is beaming on the statue. As the sandstone reddens in the former, so it pales in the latter. The faces, all three equally impressive now, grow white, not like marble, but like death, and more wonderful in death. Not a sound, not a breath disturbs the deep stillness. It is as though the world waited the passing of a king. “Not all the pens that ever poets held”, murmurs the *Cynic*,—no more,—and we break up our long watch, and return in silence.

XIV

THE LOG-BOOK OF SS. "PRINCE ABBAS" (*continued*)

JOURNEY

Thursday.—We sail before daybreak, so there is no hope of looking on the giant faces again—to our deep regret. Imagination, however, often pictures the change as the statues first emerge from the night, slowly take form, and then, as the red glow of the risen sun touches them, live again. To see this is the hope cherished for a future day, this, and to see the Sphinx at every moment, in every mood. To-day an extraordinary change has come over the climate. Geographically we are in the tropics, meteorologically, heading for the South Pole. The wind tears along, fretting the stolid Nile into a fury. Her waves grow to billows, and break in crests and spray.

As we near Wady Halfa, toward mid-day, I have a curious experience, in which wind and wave and

a native sailor perform a one-act tableau, "tragical—comical—historical—pastoral", as Polonius might have classed it. A gust of wind has carried my straw hat overboard. Several of the crew make mighty efforts—chiefly expended in noise and commotion—to reclaim it, produce ropes and poles, which they use with such dexterity as to put it entirely out of reach. When they realise it has gone, and while they give me the sympathy of strange groans and gestures, one of their number rapidly divests himself of turban and jersey and springs headlong into the water. Like all Nubians the fellow swims like a fish, and getting up a great pace with the overhand stroke, he quickly overhauls the hat and swims with it to shore, reaching Halfa just as the boat draws alongside.

The little town, like Aswan, stretches in a picturesque line along the east bank of the river, and looks across to a far, monotonous plain of sand and rock, treeless and uninhabited, on the other side. In the afternoon we explore its one main street, where the native bazaars are situated, meet and defy the clamour of importunate merchants and the temptations of "genuine" antiquities, and later take donkeys and go in a party to visit a Soudanese village, which is nothing more than a congeries of squalid, mud-brick hovels, like a colony of mole-hills—a veritable slum of the desert. A rabble of uninviting-looking folk gathers round us, strange

in language, ugly in face and form, sordid in dress—a community of anthropoid apes, with a distant semblance of humanity, could scarce have been less like humanity, or half so coarse and repellent. After much persuasion on the part of our dragoman, one of their ladies—whether the village beauty or not we have no standard wherewith to judge, though the added tinsel of her attire distinguishes her in some measure from the rest—begins to dance for us, the “dance” consisting of slow and slight gyrations of body accompanied by a constant strutting movement, the face meanwhile distorted into set, frog-like expressions, of which pouting lips and leering eyes are the chief constituents. Slow to exhibit her prowess, she seems willing to exercise it indefinitely, the villagers grouped round the while turning their faces first on us and then on the dancer, though I fancy not in admiration of the latter, but rather like mechanical toys in which some hidden contrivance determines the movement. Indeed, the performance itself might be accounted for in the same way, so mechanical, yet so bizarre is it.

We do not long stay to test the lady’s patience, but end a most unedifying entertainment with our gift of baksheesh, and turn willingly homeward. Our donkeys are capital animals, and we soon leave the others far behind. Instead of returning by the track we came—the track beaten by the folk of the village—we make a long detour over the level sand

dunes. As we scamper the *Cynic* asks : " How old must one be to confess

" The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by ",

with a willing donkey beneath one, and the open desert in front ? " And while we discuss it, almost profanely in our merriment, the sun sets, and the glow spreads over desert and sky, and question and subject alike seem trifling.

Friday.—A day of novel experiences, most considerately arranged as an antidote to a week's Egyptology ; one in which, as the *Cynic* brutally observes, " We shall be expected neither to rhapsodise upon the persons of the Egyptian pantheon nor to languish over moonlit statues, but can just enjoy ourselves ". Certain antiquities, as it proves, come into the day's programme, but they are not of sufficient grandeur or interest to falsify the *Cynic*'s prophecy or obtrude uncomfortably on minds abandoned to levity. Like children we are looking forward to a day's donkey-riding, and to the wonders of the wild, silent, unfamiliar desert. We are told, too, that the famous rock of Abusir, which is our destination, provides one of the grandest views of Nile and desert to be found in all Egypt : altogether a delectable prospect.

From the steamer we are transhipped to a felucca, in order to gain a point a couple of miles further

south, and on the opposite bank, where donkeys are waiting to convey us the remainder of the journey. Excitements begin the moment we are settled in the felucca, and its great sail is unfurled. The wind blows half a gale, and the waves run high; round a further bend of river higher still, as we catch the full force of the wind from the open desert. There is genuine alarm on the face of several passengers, but least disguised on that of our dragoman, who issues imperious orders to the crew with muttered ejaculations to other powers, and both with the most serious concern. Were there real cause for alarm, that dragoman's expression would surely go some way toward relieving it ; I think it would have absorbed one's attention through an earthquake. But suddenly a new terror is added ; the boat hangs a moment in its swift flight, shivers from stem to stern so forcibly that some of the passengers are thrown off their seats, and emits a deep hiss—we have rubbed over a sand-bank. One pair of arms is thrown heavenward. But we are soon free ; the pace we are going, the momentum of a felucca and fifteen passengers, have spared us further trouble—and that alone, I should judge from the character of the signs. The experience is repeated many times before we run safely ashore on the other side. Here our donkeys are waiting, saddled and bridled, and we are soon away at a canter through a world of golden desert and blue sky.

A donkey-ride in the desert! Let mock who will, but to the simple in heart there are few more joyous experiences in life. Once astride a donkey—the sturdy, willing breed of Egypt—is indeed to become simple in heart, whether one will or no, to hark back to youth and the gladness of youth. One cannot be dignified on a donkey; one cannot help but be merry. There are excitements, too, especially with a donkey-boy in the rear whose ways, like Ah Sin's, are mysterious. An hour's ride has hazards as many and various as an eighteen-hole golf course. And then the crisp air and unclouded sky, a carpet kindly as turf, and an open plain free as the ocean is free, trackless like it, and illimitable! To-day the wind rushes along with us, past us, whirling the sand into fierce little eddies, but never lifting it high enough to cause us inconvenience.

We have not proceeded far when a ludicrous mishap occurs, one of those most usual on such occasions, which fit the laughing mood, and test it. The *Cynic's* donkey, going at full gallop, stumbles badly and precipitates the rider head over heels into a sand-drift. He collects himself and various scattered possessions, all uninjured, and resumes the saddle.

After an hour's riding, or more, we reach higher ground; the sand gives place to hummocks of rock, which become more and more rugged, and at last culminate in a peak of greater dimensions and more

imposing height than the rest. This is the rock of Abusir. At the foot we leave our donkeys, and an easy climb of three or four minutes brings us to the summit, where suddenly the whole prospect bursts open before our eyes. Stout Cortez, when first he looked over the Pacific, he and his companions, "silent upon a peak in Darien", could scarcely have experienced surprise greater than this. The broken ground over which we have travelled the last mile or so has served to disguise both the height and the situation of Abusir, and leaves one totally unprepared for the result. At this very point the range of hills terminates as abruptly as if a knife had severed them, and below, and southward, sheer down three hundred feet, lies the level plain stretching away to incredible distance, and running through the midst of it, like a silver band, the Nile swirling along seventeen miles of cataract, and broadening into a great sullen pool at the foot of the precipice. At flood-time it must be a wonderful sight to see these miles upon miles of river boiling and tumbling among the dark boulders which impede its course, but now its waters glide smoothly as a summer stream, and at this distance are scarcely ample enough to be impressive. But the vastness, the shining leagues of golden desert, and more than this, the lifelessness, the emptiness, as of infinite space—this is the wonder of Abusir, a wonder so great as to be almost appalling. And at its furthest

bound the river can still be traced, gleaming like a mirror on the horizon.

While we are watching, we notice three or four dusky forms appear from among the rocks below. They reach the bank of the river, rapidly divest themselves of their scanty clothing, and leap into the water. Whence out of all this tenantless wilderness have they come? and what is their purpose in hazarding a swim in swift currents and among a confused mass of ugly boulders? Only when the swim is safely over, and those same dusky forms come running round the base of the rock with the obvious intention of storming it, do we realise that the performance had been arranged for our special benefit, and that we, shorn of the privilege of calling for the tune, have now to pay the piper.

The return journey is less pleasant. The wind has increased rather than lessened, and, tropical or not, it has the keen, cutting edge of an English north-easter. For the sake of comfort I dismount and walk most of the way alongside my donkey—a procedure which seems utterly to mystify the boy. We take lunch at Messrs Cook's rest-house, where both meal and rest are most welcome, and then wander about the ruins of an XVIIIth dynasty temple close at hand. Traces of a quay and an imposing brick pylon are the only external features of interest. But inside, on the truncated pillars, columns, and walls, there are many charming bits of sculptured

relief, on which the colour still lingers. It matters not how humble a building is, or how dilapidated, the joy of these coloured fragments never fails. At the temple of Beheni there is little else to see, and yet, coming from the monotonous glare of desert upon this enclosure of grey walls splashed with the blues and greens and orange-reds which three thousand years have mellowed, but not dimmed, and even though the splashes be few, is reward enough for a whole day's journeying.

Saturday.—Long before daybreak the steamer starts on the homeward journey. To-day there are no stopping-places, no temples to visit, no rides or tramps through the sand. The day's task is to be happy and content with some thirty fellow-passengers in a space rigidly circumscribed. But first there is the hope of just one more glimpse of Abu Simbel. I go on deck soon after sunrise for the purpose. The air is bitterly cold—how cold it can be on the Upper Nile only those know who have experienced it, and none others would believe. But, sheltered from the wind, the sun, even at the moment of rising, is powerful enough to give a feeling of delicious warmth. But one quality in all these mornings of Upper Egypt is unfailing—the exquisite freshness, which provides a sense of wings and of soaring, like the first hours of an English autumn day, while lawns and hedgerows are still drenched with the night dews. Here in the desert

there is no dew, no fragrance in the air, yet the feel is the same ; the desire to draw deep breaths the same, and to laugh aloud.

I find my sheltered spot and an imprisoned gleam of sun which has managed to evade the awning, and wait contented. But soon the fear crosses my mind that somehow I have missed the temple among the rude forms and embrasures of a long irregular line of hills. Nothing seems more likely than that the four colossi should have been overlooked in the confusion of surrounding shapes ; nothing proves less likely when at length they emerge—take form suddenly out of the rude mass of rock as though newly created, and then as suddenly and completely, as we hurry past, return to it. The glimpse is brief, but, tantalising as it is, it fits the wonder, the unspeakable, ever-increasing wonder of Abu Simbel ; it repeats the miracle of three thousand years ago, of a temple and its four giant warders born of a mountain, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter.

For many hours of the day the wind continues strong and keen, effectually dispelling the amenities of a Nile cruise. But towards evening the wind drops, and it is possible to believe we are in the tropics. It is a sudden leap from a March to a mid-summer's day. Passengers emerge from fur coats and rugs, and emerge thawed. We steam on long after it is dark, guided among the hidden sand-banks by Providence and the full moon ; until,

towards bed-time, and after a day unblessed save for a minute's glimpse of Abu Simbel, we draw in to some indistinguishable tenantless port for the night.

Sunday.—Our last day, and a busy one, begun with one of those delightful early morning tramps while the air is yet fresh from the night, and the sand cool to one's feet, and beautiful to look upon. Later the glaring light deadens it ; in the early morning the light plays and dances on it as on snow. The little temple of Dendur stands some way back from the river on a gentle slope of sand-hill. Close by is a small cluster of mud cottages, the only habitations of an almost illimitable waste. Few of the inhabitants are abroad, and those mostly quite young and undeniably dirty children, clamouring for baksheesh, or offering their village wares for sale. Half a dozen goats are browsing—on heaven knows what ! Altogether a scene of squalor and desolation, of human misery and denial, except that nothing seems wholly abandoned where such sunshine is, nothing entirely sad where the light of heaven dances so joyously all day long, and every day. Yet how little of all good gifts these fellahs of Upper Egypt have save the climate, and surely how much that is !

The temple dates from the days of the Roman occupation. Of the east end only the doorway remains, and beyond are the ruined walls of an open court, a vestibule, and two chambers. There are the

familiar reliefs of the gods and of the king and of the offerings—all familiar ; the same, yet not the same. For only a careless eye can fail to see the enormous differences which mark the various stages of Egyptian sculpture ; how in one age the art is alive and grows, in another more advanced and still living and growing, in another, perhaps more skilful in craft but dead—a mere copy of ancient models, wherein tradition only, not art, lives. This is the delight : not to distinguish one from the fifty other gods, but to note those qualities of style which mark one age from another, and which are of all these silent, lifeless stones the part that lives and speaks. So, passing from temple to temple day by day, one has in this treasure-house of Upper Egypt twenty centuries of alternating life and growth and death, twenty centuries of a nation's ups and downs, written clearly enough to read, and humanly enough to give delight. In Roman times—the reliefs at Dendur show it—the art of Egypt was dead. Many of the figures are charmingly coloured, skilfully executed ; but the boldness of line, the freedom, the vigour, the initiative, these have gone.

There are signs, too, here, as in so many temples, of the enormities done by the early Christians during the few centuries of our era in which they flourished in the Nile valley. They used the temples already existing for their own worship, plastered over the walls, hacked and hewed the sculptures.

By the former procedure they saved many of the wall reliefs, and preserved the colour ; by the latter they did hideous and irretrievable damage. Their purpose was to destroy the lineaments of the ancient gods of Egypt, the gods once dear to the people, and now forsaken, and they succeeded to such an extent that over and over again only ugly scarred and chipped blotches are left to denote the site of a former mural sculpture. Most of the temples of Egypt have suffered in this way. At Dendur, as elsewhere, there are evidences of still another phase in the life-history of a temple. Large areas of the walls are smeared with black, as though stones from the venerable pile of a Manchester warehouse had been incorporated. And, indeed, the effect has been brought about in the same way, by smoke. As portions of the temple were set apart for religious worship, so other portions provided dwellings for the officiating priests and eremites; and the smoked walls betray the homely uses to which the adherents of a later faith submitted the stately fanes of an earlier. The discoloration is the more noticeable and the more offensive from its presence on the lustrous surface of the rich red Egyptian sandstone, and in contrast with the pure brilliance of all else Egyptian.

An hour later we draw in shore at Kalâbsheh, where we first visit the diminutive rock-temple of Bêt-el-Walî, which stands a short distance from the larger temple. Like nearly all other rock-temples

it was built by Rameses II., and again in commemoration of battles and victories. Only a vestibule, a small columned hall, and an empty sanctuary are left. These all lie within the rock; but originally a court-yard and gate-towers projected some way forward into the open ground. Here, as at Amada, I should like to wander at will and without either cicerone or following. It is a place to be alone in, unhastened, undisturbed. On nothing the eye rests but it finds pleasure and excitement, one object after another luring it on before the last is half absorbed, or itself half satisfied. At this moment I believe I know how a child feels standing open-eyed, open-mouthed before a Christmas tree. The freshness, the novelty, the wide range of subjects, the delicious naïveté of the mural decorations, especially of a day when the artist went to nature for his models, and felt the wonder and the beauty, are enchanting in a way quite unlike anything in classical and greater art—not so much in the man's way, perhaps, as in the child's.

In the columned hall at Bêt-el-Walî Rameses has had represented scenes on the one side from his victories over the Syrians, on the other from those over the Ethiopians. The latter depict him receiving the spoils of war and the pledges of peace—bountiful enough to satisfy a Pharaoh's greed,—among which are led or driven innumerable animals, wild and domestic. The execution of the latter is

wonderful. Wolves and sheep, lions and lambs, bulls and deer and dogs, in dangerous proximity it is true, are brought as offerings—the whole mammalia of Nubia, possibly. And not only are they most beautifully modelled, scarcely less so than the fine examples of an earlier art in the tombs of Sakkarah, but each animal is given the expression and movements peculiar to it. A thousand years later, in Greek or Roman days, the artist would have been content to delineate the species, and to leave them as lifeless as the creatures of a toy Noah's ark ; these, the earlier artist has brought from the desert and the homestead.

If choice were given, one would no more visit the temple of Kalâbsheh to-day than a house during spring-cleaning. A French Egyptologist, with an army of men, is busy restoring it. Masons, labourers, scaffolding, pulleys, piles of stones numbered and in order, block the doorways and obscure the sculptured walls. Trolley lines run from end to end of the building. As we enter, a gang of workmen, men and youths, are moving a stone from one place to another—fifty or sixty of them levering and dragging with planks and cables one huge block of masonry, not the original block manipulated by the Egyptian builders, but a reft and dilapidated portion of it. They heave and strain amidst a jabber of tongues ; commands, recriminations, remonstrances fill each pause, and alternate

with the cheery, rhythmical strains of native song. These were the very methods in use when the temple was built twenty-two centuries ago, the same simple tools, the same race of workmen. It is a peep into far-off history. Possibly the single difference between the former scene and this is the visit of a Cook's tourist party !

And what a temple Kalâbsheh is ! What grandeur, spaciousness, opulence ! It was a temple in the days of the XVIIIth dynasty, 1600 B.C., but the fabric as we see it to-day is in part Ptolemaic and in part Roman. In front a great terrace stretches from temple to river, sufficiently preserved to awaken visions of former days when the royal barges drew in to shore and a pageant of gloriously apparelled potentates and priests and maidens passed along to the temple. The pylon is entirely undecorated, and lies at a slight angle with the main axis of the building. Only a single column of the three colonnades which formerly ran along the sides of the vast open court is now perfect, but several others have been more or less restored. The most beautiful feature of all is the screen-wall, with its four exquisitely proportioned columns, at the rear of the court, the former surmounted by a richly carved cornice, and covered with sculptured figures and hieroglyphs. In the centre is a gateway leading to the hypostyle hall, in which two columns with foliated capitals remain, and beyond that again are three chambers or sanct-

uaries, one behind the other. Even in ruins, and with all its upset, the richness of the carving, on walls and capitals, the grouping of the columns, and above all the noble proportions, leave an impression of delight greater than any other temple of Nubia, save Abu Simbel. What a task to be given the restoration of the former order and beauty out of this chaos ! The fallen stones lie thick and mounded on the ground—possibly sufficient and sufficiently preserved to give back to the temple its essential character.

As we leave, many natives waylay us with necklaces of Nubian beads and other local wares. They follow us to the boat, persistently driving their bargains every inch of the way. Some of the necklaces are charming—most of us want to purchase ; but the native merchant knows their market value, and is inexorable in maintaining it, calmly meeting all proffers with the remark that he can wait for next week's visitors. I make my purchase, well contented both with it and the cost. A fellow-passenger still holds off—at the last moment the salesman will take his price, he complacently assures us. The last moment has come. It is a beautiful necklace and the passenger wants it. The drawbridge is up, the boat leaves the shores. The haggling still goes on, more and more hurriedly. “ All right, take it ! ” cries the Nubian, and flings the bauble towards the boat ; an eager hand is stretched out to

seize it, it falls short, and drops into the deep and muddy waters of the Nile.

In the early afternoon we are back at Shellal. There are still several hours to wait before the train starts for Aswan, so we take feluccas across to Philæ. As the *Cynic* remarks, there is only one place in the world where you can occupy the time between trains by visiting Philæ. A crew of eight jolly Nubian boys rows us over the glaring water, singing as they go. The few palm-trees, left from the days when Philæ was a considerable island, are now struggling for life, buried to the crowns in water. Instead of the wind rustling through the great feathery branches, the ripple washes among them with a sound of melancholy and foreboding. The temple itself is so far submerged that we have to visit most of the buildings in a boat, or not at all. We return to the *Prince Abbas* for tea, take farewell of our fellow-passengers, of a kindly, unobtrusive captain, of a dragoman whom the *Cynic* had vaguely characterised by the adjective (used on every possible occasion calling for remark by Dominie Sampson) "prodeegious!" and of a boat whose comforts were only to be counted by the hours spent aboard her, and devote the remaining time to watching the lights of evening on sky and lake. What a scene it is, of radiance and colour! And there is Philæ in the midst, mystic, wonderful, rising out of the waters like the spirit of its former self.

XV

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

EVEN when Egypt first emerged from darkness into the dawn of history, at a period probably four thousand years before our era, she was already in possession of a fully developed hieroglyphic or picture writing. Each sign was carefully formed, while the more elaborate required both patience and skill in the execution. Before many centuries were over, when affairs of state and the growing intercourse between men and nations rendered a more facile script necessary, a cursive form of writing—known to scholars as hieratic—came into use. It was simply hieroglyphics written rapidly and continuously, its letters formed with just so much resemblance to the original signs as to show their derivation, and with as wide variation as allowed of their being easily and flowingly written. This hieratic was used by the scribes in all periods, but it never replaced hieroglyphic writing in the decoration of temples and tombs. Throughout the

thousands of years of its history, under native-born and Nubian Pharaohs, when later a Semitic race of shepherd kings held dominion, and during the concluding six centuries when Greece and Rome occupied the throne, the guilds of architecture clung to the hieroglyphs of their forefathers not only in spirit but so tenaciously even to the letter that hardly a sign was altered from first to last. A nation must be counted artistic that preserved a slow and exacting style of inscription, merely because of its inherent beauty of form, when an easier alternative was available; while, on the other hand, the constant practice in carving signs so varied and comprehensive engendered the love of form and shapeliness and maintained efficiency of execution.

The Greeks reserved their sculpture for frieze and pediment. The Egyptians applied it broadcast to every surface. They covered the walls with scenes of battle or of festival, with life-size figures of gods and kings, with graceful designs arranged in blank spaces, and with hieroglyphic inscriptions everywhere. The religious representations vary in execution; in subject they preserve a sameness which soon grows monotonous, and which, when the art is debased, becomes aggressive. Kings make the customary offerings, the gods deign to accept; the gods give back in return—give life, happiness, strength,—the outstretched arm of the king takes. And, as in the case of dispensations of more recent

date, "no one seems one penny the worse"—or better. The curse of an unshakable imperturbability is on deities and royalties alike. Not a shadow of emotion crosses the face of either. The faces are finely featured, dignified, intelligent, the figures kingly, but both are rigid, inexpressive, secret as the stone in which they are carved. The art of Egypt is the art of concealment. The workmanship varies from age to age; subject, arrangement, design are cast in the unalterable mould of Egyptian sacred art. Millenniums of years, fresh infusions of race, foreign domination, developments in the ethical code and wide divergencies in ideals and customs—these come and go, like the ebb and flow of tides; but the delineations of deities and of ceremonials abide in the form into which they were at first petrified. The creeds of the priests and the oligarchy may alter. Ideas which were once held literally become in process of time no more than mere symbolisms of an inner truth. But the rest of men it is considered wisest to keep to the old formulares and beliefs, served up without so much deviation as a hair's-breadth, lest curiosity and reason be brought to bear on questions which are the prerogative of the priesthood. To such an extent was this the case that to Cato it appeared "strange that one priest can refrain from laughing when he looks at another".

Yet the religious art abounds in interest. With all its monotony, all its ceaseless repetition, all its

lifelessness and conventionality, it represents the history of religion through thousands of years of human searching and aspiration, and shows the continuity in these things over succeeding ages and among different races and different faiths. The ancient Egyptians had their trinity, their divine birth, their annunciation, and an invincible trust in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting, and the writing on the wall of every temple proves how strenuously they held to their beliefs. Most of all, and particularly in later times, they clung to the notion of motherhood in the divine scheme. Isis suckling her babe Horus becomes the favourite symbol of their faith. It is found on temple walls, on seals, it is sculptured in tiny statues, in lapis lazuli for the wealthy, in a dozen mediums suited to the means of the poor, for whom especially it rapidly became the most cherished of all sacred images. As Professor Petrie expresses it, "We may even say that but for the presence of Egypt we should never have seen a Madonna".¹

From the complexities and intricacies of Egyptian religion it is well-nigh impossible to obtain order and meaning. The chief difficulty is due to the fact that the new ideas and beliefs which came in the train of development were added to those in vogue in earlier days, and were not permitted to supersede them, so that inconsistencies arose which must have

¹ Petrie's *Religion and Conscience*, p. 46.

been impossible to reconcile even at the time, except to unquestioning faith, and which leave an incoherent jumble for the consideration of students of to-day. But progress went on steadily from a low form of worship to a high. At first men selected animals for their devotions, those forms of life which they could watch, yet only partially understand. They were near enough to arouse concern, yet remote enough to enfold mystery, and to stimulate wonder, respect, or awe. The crocodile, strange and uncanny in its form and habits, was a danger to man, and must be propitiated ; the hawks of the desert, possessing dominion over the air and coming and going mysteriously as the winds of heaven, were his friends, they cleared the field of its pestilential refuse after battle, spared him trouble, and saved him from disease by scavenging the waste-heaps of his villages, and to them must be repaid honour and gratitude. Nor was it any wonder that, at a later stage, when animals came to typify celestial bodies, the hawk became associated with the sun-god ; his flashing eye could look at the sun without flinching, and his alone was the gift to soar into illimitable heights of blue, sunward. And even when the educated classes had long passed these primitive conceptions, and when their religion had become speculative and immaterial, the old picture-forms of deities were preserved : Ra-Harmachis was still figured with a hawk's head; Thoth, who pre-

sided over learning—himself the amanuensis of the gods—still kept his ibis-head; and Sekmet, the god of war, remained a lioness.

At first each town or community had its presiding god—hence it is their name is legion ; then, as one town rose into pre-eminence, the tutelary god grew in importance and his influence spread over an ever-increasing area until, when a single city achieved metropolitan power, like Thebes under the New Empire, it raised its local deities to a position commensurate with its own, and the Theban gods became the national gods of Egypt. But the local deities were held in too great regard by their special adherents to be wholly superseded by a god, however great, of some neighbouring town. They accepted, could not do otherwise than accept, the new-comer, but they contrived to keep the old, or some likeness of him, by merging the persons, names, and attributes of both. In this fashion polytheism passed on to what Max Müller called a henotheism, in which the characteristics of various gods pass indiscriminately from one to another, and their qualities are held so far in common that only their names and perhaps some differences of feature are left to distinguish them. The process goes on, always towards monotheism, until, in the words of Caird, “The religion of Egypt ends with the idea of pantheistic unity symbolised by all finite forms, but expressed by none”. A dozen, nay, a hundred

gods and goddesses are limned on the walls, carved in precious stones, in wood, in bronze, but Egypt, in her own lifetime, had passed from the beliefs those crude forms represent, and at last emerged into a pantheistic monotheism.

Framing the pictures in perpendicular rows, or sometimes occupying a whole wall, or tastefully grouped among the figures of different scenes, are the hieroglyphic inscriptions. The picture-signs could be shaped to every need of the sculptor. They could be written horizontally in either direction, vertically in columns; shaped with the minuteness and delicacy of cameos, or cut in deep bold lines to a size sufficient to give character and dignity to the architrave spanning the loftiest columns, and to lend richness to the most massive piers. They enjoined a double care on the part of the sculptor; they constituted a written language, and must therefore obey the rules of syntax; they had grace and symmetry of form and must be proportioned, spaced, and arranged with a view to decorative effect. There are many places, as Abu Simbel and the tomb of Seti, where one may see how the work was done, the care, the method. In an unfinished chamber of the latter, roughly formed hieroglyphs and figures, scrawled in black pigment, are scattered over the walls. They are the work, perhaps, of a scribe learned in the ritual of the dead. His was the literary share in the proceedings. It was he who

decided what inscriptions to use, what formularies, which gods to represent, and the gifts they were to bestow—to choose, in a word, among the elaborate and endless alternatives of mortuary decoration, and then to indicate his decision in rough outlines for the guidance of the artist. On the same wall are the finished drawings done in yellowish-red pigment. These are not always superimposed on the figures previously drawn. For now the artist is at work, and it is his business not only to draw accurately, but also to adjust and proportion the relative figures of gods and king and the hieroglyphic signs with due regard to beauty. In this instance he has completed his task with the utmost care and accuracy, and there the work ended. For some reason (likely enough the king's death) the chamber was left unfinished,—left in the hour, it seems, between the artist's going and the sculptor's coming. When the historian Diodorus watched the sculptors at work in the first century of our era, art had become entirely imitative and lifeless. The only quality to admire was the rapidity of their work. Statues and inscriptions were turned out with the precision and reliability of a machine, and the ancient art of Egypt had degenerated to the shallowest artifice.

But the writing on the wall and in papyri, beautiful as it is in the hands of artist and sculptor, is the language of ancient Egypt and bears the record of her life and thought. The formal inscriptions are

turgid and full of sound. A modern vocabulary is strained to its utmost limits in reproducing them, but often they are picturesque in phrasing, and sometimes show restraint and feeling. A god converses with the Pharaoh in this wise : " My face is toward thee, my heart is toward thee. . . . The sand of the desert on which I am reaches to me, spoiling me ; perform thou that which is in my heart, for I know that thou art my son who reverences me ; draw nigh, and behold I am with thee ". But when a mere man, though of princely blood, approaches the Pharaoh, he thus abases himself : " Thy servant, the dust of thy feet, at the feet of my lord, my king, my sun, seven times, and seven times more, I fall down ", and he maintains this abject tone, even betters it, as he proceeds, assuring the king that though a brick may move from under the coping, yet will he not move from under the feet of his master.

When epic becomes the medium, and Rameses the Great the hero, and the battle of Kadesh the occasion, a court poet seizes the threefold opportunity, and the king allots vast surfaces of temple-wall to perpetuate it :

" Then his majesty arose like Mentu,
He seized his panoply of war,
He clad him in his habergeon,
Himself like Baal in his hour
Then did his majesty dash on ;

He entered into the midst of his foes, of the vile Kheta ;
He alone by himself, no other with him.

When his majesty turned to look,
Lo, two thousand five hundred chariots were around him".

The solitary fighter turns to his god, Ammon, and Ammon comes to his deliverance. He deals defeat swift and deathly as befell the Assyrian host of Sennacherib :

" Never was even one among them his hand to fight,
Their hearts rotted in their bodies for fear,
Their arms were all powerless
I (says Rameses) caused them to plunge into the water,
Even as the crocodiles plunge
I was slaying in among them,
I loved that never a one should look behind him,
Never another turn his face ".¹

The hyperbole extends beyond the words to the thought, and there the Egyptian belies himself more seriously. For, spite of all the savage utterance, all the words of blood, his race was kindly and humane beyond all races of antiquity. Punishments were dealt out not only as retribution, but with the intention of reforming the evil-doer. Leniency was extended towards prisoners of war, and the purposeless brutalities of battle were never indulged to the extent practised by other nations. In the great naval engagement scene at Medinet Habu, Egyptian sailors are represented swimming to the help of the

¹ Petrie, *History of Egypt*, vol. iii. p. 55 *et seq.*

drowning enemy. At home the Egyptian entered with heart and feeling into home life, honoured his wife, cherished his children.¹ In statues and in stelas man and wife are depicted side by side, and in hunting scenes the child is constantly shown as his father's companion.

The duty of child to father was expressed in words almost identical with the fifth commandment of Moses : "The son who hearkens to the word of his father, he shall grow old thereby". This relationship between parent and child is amplified in many other texts, the former protesting among the things that matter, "I have done harm to no child"; and the latter avowing, "I did that which was pleasing to my parents, I was the joy of my brethren, the friend of my companions". Charitableness was a fundamental rule of morality. "As for me," says one epitaph, "I have been the staff of the old man, the nurse of the infant, the help of the distressed". Another confesses, "I gave bread to the hungry and clothes to the naked I was a father to the orphan, a husband to the widow, a protection from the wind to the shivering; I am one who spake what was good" (not a scandal-monger).

Slander, unruliness of tongue, loudness of speech, are reprimanded more emphatically than almost all other sins.² Eight out of forty articles of confession

¹ Sayce, *Early Israel and the Surrounding Nations*, p. 191.

² See Petrie's *Religion and Conscience*, p. 116.

embrace this one subject : "My mouth hath not run on"; "I have not quarrelled"; "My mouth hath not been voluble in my speech"; "My voice is not loud"; and so on. And even in pyramid days the wise Ptah-Hotep had written, "Let thy heart be overflowing, but let thy mouth be restrained". And when the prayer gains lyrical utterance and is spoken to Thoth, the god of wisdom, it becomes : "O thou sweet Well for the thirsty in the desert ! It is closed up for him who speaks, but open for him who is silent. When he who keeps silence comes, lo, he finds the Well".

In these bombast is discarded. Be they exaggerated or not, and closely or not as they apply to the life of the dead man, it was by these he wished to be remembered by succeeding generations. Indeed, they were no more than paraphrases of the solemn confession, called the "Negative Confession", made on the day of judgment before the throne of Osiris. The deceased is led into the presence of the god, and thus greets him : "Hail to thee, Great God, Lord of the Two Truths ! I come unto thee, though my lord ; I draw nigh unto thee to behold thy beauties". And then he repeats, line by line, the wonderful confession of his faith on earth and here in heaven :

"I have not committed fraud and evil against men.
I have not oppressed my fellows.
I have known no meanness.

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I have not caused a man to do more than his day's work.
I have not given way to anxious care.
I have not been weak.
I have not brought any to hunger.
I have not caused any to weep.
I have not wrought deceitfully against any man".¹

The sins calling for special denial are irreverence to the gods, murder, oppression, stealing, fraud, impurity, slander, eavesdropping, and—most impressive and rare of all—heart-eating, or vain remorse.

The confession is heard in silence ; not a sound passes through all the great hall. The eyes of Osiris are upon the pleader, but not a muscle of the god's face moves either in approval or anger. The words may be idle words, such as all men speak before the judge : the test is the truth of them. And in the silence, Anubis, a god of justice, steps forward and takes the heart of the deceased man, and sets it in the balance against the weight Truth. As the balance rises or falls, as the lips have spoken false or true, is the verdict. Condemnation is death ; acquittal is life eternal : not the sequestered life of the human soul in this world, but life at one with Osiris, and merged with his, satisfied, perfected, in the green fields of Earu :

"Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea'

¹ Wiedemann's *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 249 *et seq.*

Dr Caird warns us against accepting moral tags as an indication of the ethical standard of other days and races. But the dogmas and precepts of Egypt are too many, cover too wide a field, and are too persistently reiterated to lay the civilisation that produced them open to special application of the charge. Every civilised nation thinks higher than it acts. Four thousand years hence the moral life of Europe will not be fairly judged by the Sermon on the Mount ; yet it is something that European thought accepts the teaching, and makes some show of valuing it as a guide in life. Egypt, too, had its ethical code, its bible, its accumulation of moral tenets and ideals, and the people learned them, subscribed to them, avowed them in the solemn hour of death, and were willing to acknowledge that the chances hereafter depended, not on the profession, but on the proof of virtue. The Negative Confession shows how high was the standard. That was their Sermon on the Mount ; they have also their Marcus Aurelius. For care of character was a serious charge even in early days. Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control are alike extolled. "Look well to thyself", says Any; "thy existence, lowly or lofty, is liable to change ; go straight forward, and thou wilt find the way". And again, "If thou art found good in the time of prosperity, when adversity comes thou wilt find thyself able to endure". "Be not greedy," he says, "to fill thy

stomach, for one knows no reason why he should do so ; when thou camest into existence I gave thee a different excellency " ; and he enjoins, " If a man is drunken, go not before him, even when it would be an honour to be introduced ". In the same strain a later precept urges, " Make not a companion of a wicked man ". Pride is inveighed against in the same lofty tone. Ptah-Hotep, a writer of maxims in the third dynasty, writes : " Let not thy heart be great because of thy knowledge, but converse with the ignorant as with the learned ; for the limit of skill is not attainable " ; and Any reminds his hearers, in metaphor, that " the water-courses shifted in past years, and will yet again the next year. The large pools dry up, and their shores become deep cracks. Nothing comes to man alike ". And in worldly wisdom the same teacher gave such maxims as " Go not out with a foolish man, nor stop to listen to his words " ; and " Apply thine heart while thou art speaking, that thou mayest speak things of distinction " . . . " Let thy heart be overflowing, but let thy mouth be restrained."

There were periods of ebb and flow alternating in the long course of Egyptian history, and the writing on the wall gives silent admission. Life and art had utterly degenerated by the reign of Rameses IV., and thus the king prays to his god: " And thou shalt give to me health, life, long existence, and a prolonged reign. . . . And thou shalt give me to

eat until I am satisfied, and thou shalt give me to drink until I am drunk . . . and thou shalt grant me contentment every day". From this gross materialism we may turn to the simple outpourings of the spirit in prayer : "Ammon-Ra, I love thee and I have enfolded thee in my heart"; and the outcry of the penitent : "O punish me not for my many sins". In these it is the heart that speaks at a supreme moment of human experience, when love of God or fear of God possesses it wholly. It is the language of Hebrew poets and saints—the universal language of religion. Whether spoken to Ammon-Ra, Baal, or Jehovah, thirty centuries since or now, such words reach their destination, gain their end. The gods on the wall may not grow less repellent in our eyes, but the worshipper seems less to be pitied or ridiculed.

Rarely is the "lyrical cry" heard in Egyptian devotional literature ; but once at least a royal singer of Egypt comes near to achieving it. Dr Breasted has compared the "Praise of Aton," by Amenophis IV. (Ikhнатон), to the hundred and fourth Hebrew psalm, by placing many passages of both in parallel columns. It was a hymn sung to the One God Aton, whom the monotheistic king wished to put in place of all other gods. The age that had produced Thothmes III. and Amenophis III., the fighter of battles and the patron of the arts, put forth its final strength in producing the first religious re-

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former in history, and was then spent. It achieved the man but not the occasion: Ikhnaton was born out of due time by centuries. He abandoned Thebes in the height of its splendour to Ammon and the priests of Ammon, trekked northward to Tel el-Amarna, and there with his wife and followers built a new city and worshipped in peace according to the light and the desire that were in him. There, too, he wrote his hymn, which, though it lacks much of the beauty of phrasing of the Psalms, possesses that universality of range which brings the whole creation into the act of worship and praise.

“Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of heaven,
O living Aton, Beginning of life !
When thou risest in the eastern horizon of heaven,
Thou fillest every land with thy beauty ;
For thou art beautiful, great, glittering, high over the earth ;
Thy rays, they encompass the lands, even all thou hast
made.
Thou art Re, and thou hast carried them all away captive ;
Thou bindest them by thy love.
Though thou art afar, thy rays are on earth ;
Though thou art on high, thy footprints are the day.

When thou settest in the western horizon of heaven,
The world is in darkness like the dead.
They sleep in their chambers,
Their heads are wrapt up,
Their nostrils stopped, and none seeth the other.

Bright is the earth
 When thou risest in the horizon,
 All cattle rest upon their herbage,
 All trees and plants flourish,
 The birds flutter in their marshes,
 Their wings uplifted in adoration to thee.
 All the sheep dance upon their feet,
 All winged things fly,
 They live when thou hast shone upon them.

The barques sail up-stream and down-stream alike,
 Every highway is open because thou hast dawned.
 The fish in the river leap up before thee,
 And thy rays are in the midst of the great sea.”¹

But the voice was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Egypt was not ripe for the change. It was a case of a man measuring his strength, not against a people, but a priesthood—of an earlier Canute confronting ocean tides.

Egypt had its religious books, its philosophical maxims, its national epics, even its lyrical poetry. It possessed a learned treatise on mathematics, and the Ebers papyrus shows the extraordinary knowledge and skill which obtained in the XVIIIth dynasty in the art and practice of medicine. Certain passages in the latter might be taken from a modern text-book : many of the drugs we estimate most highly to-day were prescribed by the physician

¹ Breasted's *History of Egypt*, p. 371 *et seq.*

of three thousand years ago on his morning round of the sick folk of Thebes, and directions given for their use, not only similar in form, but embracing principles which regulate the prescriptions of to-day. Recent excavations performed by Dr Reisner are testimony to the dexterity in surgery even in earliest times. Hundreds of bodies have been unearthed showing how quarrelsome and pugnacious they were of old time, how battered and broken their limbs were, yet how successfully treatment was effected. In the most severe fractures the surgeon achieved excellent results ; only in those comparatively trifling cases in which the members of a hardy race were unlikely to complain or to exercise care were the consequences other than surgically good.

Strabo noticed the lavish sculpture—the writing on the wall—and found it reminiscent of Etruscan and archaic Greek art. And archaic it is in drawing, in subject, in impulse. Except where the human face is used as a hieroglyphic, it is invariably sculptured in profile, yet the eye is always given in full, while the body is distorted to show the whole width of the chest, and the hips almost, though not quite, in profile. The Egyptians never discovered the science of perspective ; all figures occupy the foreground, or recede only because the lines of other figures cross them. Yet the grouping is often a triumph of fine modelling and ex-

quisitely modulated lines and curves. The comprehensiveness, the sincerity, the naturalness of the art, as apart from high skill in execution—these are beyond question. But the impulse is realism ; the purpose imitation. The artist so completely effaced himself that it is nowhere possible to attribute work either to a person or a school. Such differences as exist are due to the general temper and skill of successive dynasties, not to the least show of individualism. There was always room for the exhibition of taste in design and grouping; but in the case of figures a standard had been set, and there was nothing in the spirit of Egyptian culture, dominated as it was by unyielding priestcraft, to question or rebel. The god was given the impulsive expression which may have hidden a multitude of divine qualities, but expressed none ; while the Pharaoh was portrayed, with a persistent regard for royal vanity, in the guise of perpetual youth and beauty, performing the religious rites and ceremonies in an attitude handed down by long tradition and faithfully perpetuated.

The advantages of stereotyped forms in sacred art are obvious ; we admit this widely to-day. But in the case of Egypt there was a greater force than expediency at work. As a race, the Egyptians were totally incapable of abstractions ; they thought and felt and understood only the concrete. They wished the simple truth visualised in everything. They

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were not satisfied even with the written words of their own language, but must appease their minds with using "determinatives" in addition. When, for instance, the name of an animal was written or sculptured, they put a figure of the animal after it, and the word "to drink" they followed with the figure of a person drinking. This habit of mind held them prisoners—prisoners on parole, who gave their word, kept it to the last, but achieved greatly.

XVI

OPENING A SARCOPHAGUS

EXCAVATIONS on the island of Elephantiné in the winter of 1907-8 unearthed many treasures of the New Empire period—statuettes in wood and bronze, pottery of beautiful blue glaze, vases and amulets. These had been heaped together when, a thousand years later, Ptolemaic builders were disturbing the foundations of an earlier temple in order to lay those of a new. Beneath all those huge mounds of earth, turned up in the process of recent exploration, were hidden relics of both periods. The excavator, M. Clermont-Ganneau, was in search of none of these things. A Hebrew temple had also at one time stood on the island, and his hopes were set on the discovery of Aramaic papyri buried in the general wreckage. It was like hunting for a diamond in a mine where most other precious stones were abundant. These, whether they repaid the task or not, at least refreshed it. But many are the disappointments, keen

the delights, of those who go a-digging in the desert.

One day a stone altar was found, simple in design and undecorated, and, near by, an oblong stone slab, down which ran streaks of bitumen, as though a mummy had recently been prepared upon it. Then a few days later, a few yards further away, the workmen discovered a large square sarcophagus, hewn, all but the lid, out of a single block of sand-stone. Its shape foretold the contents—if indeed these had not already been removed in a previous age—to be the mummy of a sacred ram.

The ram was sacred to the ram-headed god Khnum, who, though universally worshipped, and in later periods associated with Ra, the sun-god himself, was in a special degree the presiding deity of the First Cataract. The animal served to represent the god on earth; he was chosen for some special quality, some mark which singled him out from his fellows, and thenceforth consigned to the cloistral life of the temple sanctuary; and, at death, mummified and buried in the precincts of the temple with every sign of priestly reverence. In the late period of Egyptian history this veneration for animals reached the most preposterous lengths. Strabo watched a pampered crocodile fed in the sacred lake of Arsinoë, where the crocodile-headed Sobk was worshipped. “The priests went up to it, some of them opened its mouth, another

put the cake (with which they had come prepared) into it, then the meat, and afterwards poured down the honey and milk." Herodotus was shown another sacred crocodile whose ears were adorned with ear-rings of molten stone or gold, and his fore-paws with bracelets ; and he remarks that the person who is eaten by a crocodile is to be considered greatly fortunate in death, and that in a conflagration the rescue of the cats is of more importance than putting out the fire—the inmates of the house afterwards sorrowing for their death ; while he who intentionally kills a sacred animal must repay with his own life.¹

At Elephantiné the ram was worshipped, and here lay one of the sacred line in his sarcophagus, awaiting exhumation—an object on which the only eyes that had looked were those of the priests of a bygone faith, nearly twenty centuries ago.

When the lid was removed the interior was full to the brim with a mixture of sand and salt, now caked so hard that it could only be removed with the help of a chisel. Slowly the reiss worked his way down, every particle of the debris being carefully examined as it was removed. The air was

¹ Erman, *A Handbook of Egyptian Religion*, p. 177, says that Herodotus must be acquitted of exaggeration in the light of recent excavations which have exposed pits into which "cats are thrown by hundreds of thousands", and "vaults where full-grown crocodiles, their eggs, and even young ones recently hatched, are buried".

heavy with stifled questions. Was there aught within, save sand? If a mummy, would it be perfect—would it be richly decorated—would it contain amulets and charms? And all the while the foreman was passing out handfuls of soil, all the while the secrets of two thousand years were being given up. More scraping went on, more soil was thrown out, little by little till, finally, the last grain of it was cleared away; and there lay in view a strange shapeless object, which might have been anything, swathed in the drab folds of a mummy-cloth. Nothing had been found in the enclosing sand except one horn and the tail, the latter mummified and wrapped apart from the carcase of the ram.

The mummy was now lifted out of its sarcophagus and carried to the stone altar a few feet away. In the drama of the life and death of a ram this was the last scene. The play had ended ages back, and now the curtain was being raised to show in tableau how it fared with the hero of the piece. In the fitness of things the ram stood on the very altar on which sacrifices had been made to him in life.

Then carefully the cloth was unloosened, and allowed to fall to the ground. The morning had so far been gloomy—one of the two or three sunless days in a whole winter of the Upper Nile—but at that very moment the clouds broke, and a blaze of light fell, not on us, or so it appeared, but on the strange lonely object on which we looked. Among

the pile of dismal soil-heaps, the thing which had till that moment been dull as they, suddenly shone and glittered like burnished gold. It was the re-incarnation of a god.

The glitter was of gold. The head of the mummy was covered with a gold mask, beaten to shape, which was prolonged downward into a breast-plate, fashioned out of papier-mâché, richly gilded and illuminated. Thus protected from the air, and in the absolutely dry soil of Egypt, the metal had scarcely lost the finest polish. A garland of bay-leaves hung round the head and entwined the neck and shoulders, hardly a stem of which was broken or a leaf missing. On the pectoral, like an illuminated missal, were figured a prayer for the dead, a representation of the mummifying of the ram in the presence of four gods of the dead, a symbolic design of the deified ram orbéd in the circle of eternity, outspread vulture-wings attached to a scarab body (that symbol of life everlasting which, evolved in Egypt, was accepted in one form or another by nearly all the civilisations of antiquity, and even turned to use in the mediæval days of Europe), and other figures and devices typifying the resurrection and union with the sun-god of the ram which had lived on earth as the personification of Khnum.

In the shroud were no relics, no amulets, no written records, save that on the breast-plate, which

was nothing more than a symbolic expression of a formulary used on all similar occasions.

Perhaps this was the last ram of the sacred line, dating from the days of the Roman occupation. The old order was changing, yielding place to new. Eastward another faith had arisen to claim men's attention. Even in the second century Christian communities were spread all over Lower Egypt, and by the reign of Constantine the Great, in the first half of the fourth century, the country was made into a diocese with six provinces, including the districts of Upper Nile. Philæ, in spite of the edicts of Theodosius, held out for another two hundred years—the last stronghold of beliefs which had served a great people through centuries never yet numbered,—but elsewhere the new teaching had found ready acceptance, and though many of the old dogmas were grafted on to it, the worship of animal gods and the mummification of the dead passed for ever.

XVII

CLIMATE AND HEALTH

PROFESSOR PETRIL has somewhere spoken of many Egypts. The particular one with which we associate the name of the distinguished Egyptologist is not the one with which most folk are concerned to-day. Of the increasing number who visit the Nile, year by year, nearly all go in search of health or pleasure, and comparatively few in pursuit of historical and archæological knowledge. So much is this the case that one might conceivably spend a whole winter in Egypt and never realise the hoard of ancient treasure it is. Temples and tombs are topics as rarely discussed as the new Velasquez or the *Diplodocus* among the same classes nearer home. How should it be otherwise? People have come for sunshine, for gaiety and comfort, and they have brought money to purchase them. Egypt sells all three.

And the delights of an eternally sunny climate are for all—or almost all. There are a certain

number who, apparently in the best of physical health, suffer from uncontrollable depression. They reach Upper Egypt well, and in eager anticipation of its pleasures, but after very few days, it may be, become dejected and spiritless and find no relief either in the changing life and movement of the hotels or in the novelties of the native bazaars, or in the many occupations and interests afforded by desert and river. The sun, which is the daily joy of others, is to them wearisome and depressing. Indeed, in this very factor, it would seem, lies the chief if not the whole source of the trouble. The exceeding dryness of the climate may in some measure account for it; but the main cause is the brilliant beating sunshine for ten hours of every day, day after day, and week after week, and the reflected glare from the surface of the desert, which gives back the light tenfold more searching and pitiless.

It is at Aswan, where the sand-wastes encroach nearest to the town and where there is least greenery for the eye to rest on, that the complaint most usually occurs; and I have met with many such cases immediately benefited by removal to the grass-grown valley of Luxor, or, even without leaving Aswan, by going merely from one hotel most exposed to the sun and glare to another a few hundred yards away, situated in pleasant shady gardens and beside the refreshing waters of the Nile. For the

same reason the constant use of smoked spectacles often proves most helpful, both for those who suffer from the severer forms of the ailment and in those more numerous cases where the symptoms are vaguer and less pronounced.

As the glare of Aswan affects a few visitors unfavourably, so the excessive dryness of its atmosphere—exhilarating to most people, and peculiarly beneficial in many complaints—is disadvantageous to others. The tourist may find himself suffering from a “cold” when, of all folk, he is least liable to colds; and having contracted one, either in the nose or upper air-passages, it is surprising to find with what persistency the symptoms linger. Doubtless many causes are at work, direct and indirect, but it is certain that an atmosphere bereft of moisture to an extent almost nowhere else known in tourist resorts, and at the same time laden with minute particles of sand, is just the one to promote such irritation of mucous membranes, and to maintain it, however produced. Here again the proportion of people affected is probably small, and the cases slight. The ailment tends to remain more local, and to give rise to less general symptoms, because of the same dry sunny climate and its bounty of exhilaration and purity.

In Egypt, as in more respectable localities nearer home, “chills” are very prevalent—on the simple principle that most ailments are passed off as chill.

The word possesses all the magic of supernatural agency, and absolves human failings and delinquencies accordingly. One may, for instance, take the ample fare of an Egyptian hotel's cuisine, course by course, without denial or dread, disregard exercise at will, and spend one's idle days with a deck-chair, French novels, and empty talk, and anticipate, when Nemesis falls, nothing more inconsequential and reproachful than a chill.

Yet what a world of trouble and disappointment this same monosyllable may inflict, and gild over ! I have known people go to Egypt, go the thousands of miles of sea and rail at great expense and trouble, often with risk,—go for the climate, and, having got there, straightway take pains to shut the "climate" out. Their complaint may need fresh air above all else, but their dread of a suspected alternative, confronting them with the mental puzzle of a Hamlet, makes them rather bear those ills they have than fly to others that they know not of.

The belief becomes a fetish to which even the vigorous and healthy subscribe. They scent danger in the crisp north wind of the desert, and the night air is anathema. Walk round the hotel when night has fallen and count the open windows. The result may be surprising, but only as any other ready proof of the extent of humanity's foibles would be. Some devices adopted for protection against this invisible foe, always, as it were, waiting its chance upon the

enemy man, are innocent enough. Provided you do not mind the discomforts of wearing flannel (the initiated show a preference for red flannel) girths round those anatomical regions which are deemed most vulnerable, there can be no particular objection to the practice. But it is quite otherwise when the visitor leaves the course of a healthy rational life from a fear of irrational consequences, and spends in his room a single hour which might be given to sunshine and fresh air.

For the air of Egypt is the best thing Egypt has to give, which is saying much. It is quite true that the very special characteristics of the climate enjoin special care. Discrepancies of temperature are very great. Not only are there days of heat-waves, preceded and followed by day after day of cutting winds from northward, but even within the limits of a single day it is not unusual in January and February to get a difference of 20° or 30° F. At mid-day the thermometer may register, in the shade, anything from 60° F. to 86° F. or 88° F., in the night-time anything from 40° F. to 65° F.

During the heat-waves which come with a stifling wind from the desert—the same in kind and quality as the dreaded Khamsin¹ of a later season—the temperature, rising to 87° F. in the day, may remain

¹ The Khamsin is a west wind which blows continuously for fifty days, and reduces Egypt to its last stage of misery and drought before the rising Nile brings relief.

as high as 70° F. at night. The air is heavy and oppressive, and grips you like a pestilence until all spirit and energy are well-nigh squeezed out. Happily the hot spells are brief in duration, rarely lasting beyond a second day, and recur at intervals of not less than three weeks. Then as surely comes delicious relief. From sleeping to waking a change, so sudden, so complete, has been brought about as could hardly be believed, short of actual experience. The air at morning has the exquisite cool and exhilaration of that of an English autumn, fresh from the heath and the dews, yet aglow with a radiance no sun of England can give. To step out on to one's balcony is like a plunge into a summer pool, so perfectly adjusted are the sensations of warmth and freshness. And what the morning has begun the day continues. From sunrise at seven to sunset at five the only variations are the gentle modulations between the delicious heat of the sun and the delicious cool of the breeze. In days of a similar temperature at home one is often willing to watch the hours go by in the capacity, as it were, of a spectator; in Egypt one joins in, and dances for joy along with them.

During the months of the winter, January, February, and March, these perfect days may be interrupted in a three weeks' course by forty-eight hours of surprising cold. The wind from the north grows to half a gale, gathering such speed and

volume that the sun fails to temper it, and lashing the Nile into crested waves. The temperature reaches at highest 59° F. or 60° F., and during many hours of the day it may be several degrees lower, but on such occasions as these it offers no indication of the actual feeling. The thermometer makes the cold only relative; one's sensations prove it actual. There is the same cutting, tearing quality in the wind which characterises the east wind at home. Strange as it may seem, at Aswan, within three or four hours' journey of the Tropic of Cancer, and even at Wady Halfa, well beyond it, winter clothing may be as necessary as under the ordinary conditions of an English winter.

When the sun is obscured, either by cloud or driven sand, the cold is so much the more intense, and, in the latter case, a new terror is added. For the discomforts of a sand-storm can hardly be exaggerated. It combines all the qualities of almost every other evil visitation of atmosphere; it stings like hail, chokes eyes and throat like a London fog, and, like a mountain mist, gathers about the wanderer from every quarter in sudden impenetrable banks of cloud, so that he and the beast he rides pause in their journey and gladly take whatever protection baggage and cloaks can provide.

To meet these changes of temperature and climate, from hour to hour, and still more from day to day, it is obvious that care and precaution are necessary.

In the case of Egypt there is special need to emphasise the fact, not because English visitors are unaccustomed to such rapid variations, but only because they do not expect to find them in a land so far south, and in a land, moreover, which is associated in their minds with tropical sunshine, date-palms, and invalids. Perhaps not one in ten of those who go there has even a fairly accurate notion of the climate, or at all realises the intense cold which he will be certain to experience at intervals from the middle of December to the middle of February, after which the temperature becomes more equable and gradually higher. If the traveller would be comfortable he must include in his wardrobe clothing suitable for both hot and cold weather, such—to follow a safe and easy rule—as would be appropriate to English summer and winter. And in its use he must dismiss all thought of guiding his practice by the application of an adage which so often determines his habit in this particular at home. He must not wait until “June (or any other month) be out”, before casting his “clout”. Without taxing either common sense or observation, he may safely trust to his own feelings for guidance, and go thinly clad on hot days, or hot hours of the day, and change into thicker garments when the others feel insufficient.

The risks run by visitors of contracting disease need only be of the slightest. Except in Cairo they are probably neither more in kind nor greater in

degree than at home. A chance case of enteric fever or of pneumonia only proves that even in the exquisite climate of Egypt such things are possible. In Cairo the dangers are increased mainly because the old town is insanitary and its inhabitants careless and uncleanly ; but even so they may be rendered insignificant by exercising ordinary precaution. No one could resist the fascination of the bazaars, where the evils lurk, and were they ten times more fearsome ; and who would shorten by one hour his wanderings through the narrow native quarters, with their hanging casements overhead, and, beneath, all the colour and noise and stir of the East ? In Old Cairo every moment means a new sensation. It is like looking down a kaleidoscope, when each movement brings an unexpected picture. It is more ; for the colour and form are only part of the pleasure ; the life behind it, half hidden or half revealed, its childlikeness at first, its inscrutability at last—all this is so much more. Yet one need not be debarred from the enjoyment of any of it, and yet refuse to drink coffee in promiscuous bazaars, when coffee chance to be offered at the completion of purchases, and desist from eating such doubtful produce as ice-cream and Turkish “ delight ”, served under similar conditions.

And, when all is said, the truth remains that even for those who never see a temple, and for those others who never see one twice, this land of desert

and the Nile teems with delight, and above all with the simple delight of living. In the hotels one may eat the customary hotel fare—if one will eat in moderation—even drink of the Nile freely, at any rate in the upper regions, without greater fear than attaches to water and food in England, and brave the vagaries of climate without more serious concern. It is quite certain that many invalids go to Upper Egypt who had best never have gone; that doctors at home often, from mistaken notions of climate, expect benefit in the case of complaints for which the climate is not specially suitable, or entirely unsuitable; but the fault is not Egypt's. No country in the world, surely, gives so many joys, or so lavishly, comprehensively, indiscriminately. She gives to all who are well, to most who are ill, to the seeker and the satiated, to the heedless and indifferent, as generously, after their kind, as to the strenuous, to the ignorant no less than the learned. Is it nothing to be in a land where for once weather ceases to be a topic of conversation—and this only because "weather" itself has ceased to be? From the first morning of waking in Upper Egypt one realises the miracle has befallen: "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light". So it was yesterday, so is it to-day, so will it be to-morrow; weather is exchanged for light, light and warmth, and the sky and the world are full of it, unchangeably.

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